

B.A.(Hons.) POLITICAL SCIENCE

Paper 1 : COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM IN INDIA

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CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES – COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The concepts of imperialism, colonialism and nationalism
- The approaches to the study of colonialism and nationalism in India: Colonial, Nationalist, Marxist and Subaltern interpretations

Introduction

The British had come to India as traders but later through a combination political alliances and annexation of territory through wars managed to establish control over the whole of India. In many other parts of the world powers like Britain established empires only through wars. Eventually at one time at the beginning of the twentieth century Britain was the largest imperial colonial power in the world. The domination of the British colonial rulers and the impact of their exploitative rule eventually led to the rise of Indian nationalism in India and also in many other colonised nations around the world. There are many questions and debates surrounding the nature of imperialism and colonialism. For instance, whether it was benevolent or was wholly for the purpose of economic exploitation and expansion of international political power, whether any nation existed in India or could have unless the British had come and united the nation, whether in the nationalist political growth that ensued only a select section of the population who were economically and socially powerful were really interested or there was born a genuine nation wide mass feeling of nationalism and a desire for independence cutting across regions, castes, classes and religions. In answering these questions the principal schools of thought and approaches have been the Colonial, the Nationalist, the Marxist and the Subaltern.

The Concepts

Imperialism basically means the political, social, economic and cultural control of an alien country by a foreign power. Originally imperialism was understood as the physical extension of territory almost always through wars of conquest but in the modern times post the second world war subtler forms of imperial control have come to be recognised which instead of relying on actual military annexations relies on a combination of trade, economic aid, technology transfers, control of essential resources like oil, weapons transfers and deals, diplomacy and the threat of sanctions (which can cripple a nation) and ultimately the threat of military action (as opposed to actual military action). Eckert has said imperialism 'is a type of politics, characterised by the striving for the extension of political, economic and intellectual power of a nation, of people and its culture over areas which lies outside its political boundaries'. The Dictionary of Human Geography defines imperialism as 'the creation and maintenance of an unequal economic, cultural and territorial relationship, usually between states and often in the form of an empire,

based on domination and subordination'. Thus imperialism necessarily involves the coming into being of a relationship between two nations characterised by domination, dependency and exploitation and may well covers the entire spectrum of the controlled country's national life including social, political, economic and cultural. Imperialism is thus understood in the present modern times in a a very wide sense and need not involve the actual setting up and running of the administration or executive governance of one nation by another. The word imperialism itself is derived from the Latin verb *imperare* (to command) and the Roman concept of *imperium* while the actual term 'Imperialism' is believed to have been first coined in the 16th century for referring to the expansionist policies of Belgium, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain mainly in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. In the present times Imperialism as explained above is understood to not only describes colonial, territorial policies, but also economic and/or military dominance and other kinds of influence.

Colonialism can be thus said to be a subset of imperialism or a is a certain variety of imperialism where one country establishes a colony in another country, a colony being as the Oxford English Dictionary defines it 'a country or area under the full and partial control of another country typically a distant one and occupied by settlers from that country'. Thus the term imperialism should not be confused with 'colonialism' as it often is. Intellectual Edward Said has aptly put it by saying imperialism involves "the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" whereas colonialism refers to the "implanting of settlements on a distant territory". Robert Young has commented imperialism operates from the centre, it is a state policy, and is developed for ideological as well as financial reasons whereas colonialism is nothing more than development for settlement or commercial intentions. The Collins English Dictionary also seems to support the *exploitative* aspect of colonialism by defining colonialism as "the policy of acquiring and maintaining colonies, especially for exploitation." The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy adopts a historical approach and "uses the term colonialism to describe the process of European settlement and political control over the rest of the world, including Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia." It admits difficulty in distinguishing between colonialism and imperialism and states that "Given the difficulty of consistently distinguishing between the two terms... colonialism as a broad concept that refers to the project of European political domination from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries that ended with the national liberation movements of the 1960s." Historically expansion of some European powers like Britain into territorial imperialism originated from the great economic gain that was to be had from collecting resources from colonies but it was usually always achieved by assuming political control by military means. The British can be said to have exploited the political weakness of the Mughal state, and, while military activity was important, what also played an important role was the economic and administrative incorporation of local elites.

Nationalism can be said to be the expression of a collective identity by a group of people living in a certain geographical territory and who socially, culturally and economically and politically identify themselves as one nation to be governed as such and by themselves. Nationalism emphasizes the collective identity where to be a nation a group of people must be autonomous politically, united significantly and substantially, and express a single national culture to a large extent. However, some nationalists have argued individualism can be an important part of that culture in some nations and thus be central to that nation's national identity. In the modern world national flags (like the tri-colour in India), national anthems, and other symbols of national identity are very often regarded sacred, as if they were religious rather than political symbols.

Historically before the emergence of nationalism, people were generally loyal to a city or to a particular king or ruler or leader rather than to their nation. Indeed they often had no notions of belonging to a nation. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica nationalism in a true sense developed with the late-18th century American Revolution and French Revolution. The term nationalism it is believed was coined by Johann Gottfried Herder (who used the word *nationalismus*) during the late 1770s. Thus it is impossible to pinpoint where and when nationalism emerged but its development can be said to have happened alongside the emergence of the modern state and the notion of rule by the people by popular will that were the underlying themes of the the French Revolution and later the American Revolution in the late 18th century.

Thus like other social phenomenon nationalism also evolved historically. Along with the emergence of social and historical conditions communities came up in various parts of the world. They often came up through tribal, slave and feudal phases of social existence. At a certain stage of social, economic and cultural development nations came into being. It was distinguished by certain specific characteristics such as

- (a) an organic whole of the members of the nation living in a distinct territory
- (b) a single economy
- (c) a consciousness of a common economic existence
- (d) a common language and
- (e) naturally a common culture which evolved.

And this process developed from sixteenth century onwards as a part of the development of human history. Generally speaking development of nationalism in various countries was a prolonged historical process. It is in the development of historical conditions that nation states developed and development of nationalism in different countries was determined by its social and cultural history - its political, economic and social structures. The character of its various classes also assumed importance often played the role of the vanguard in the struggle for a national social existence. Therefore every nation was born and forged in unique way.

The Approaches

The history of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century India is primarily the history of formation of a nation and the struggle against internal and external obstacles in that process. Indian nationalism is a modern phenomenon. It came into being during the British colonial period as a result of various subjective and objective factors and forces, which developed within the Indian society under the conditions of British rule and the impact of world forces. Pre-British India was unique. It sharply differed from the pre-capitalist medieval societies of Europe. It was a vast country inhabited by huge population speaking many languages with different religions. Socially it was dominated by a population which was Hindu in character, but there was no homogeneity. This extreme social, religious division of the Hindus in particular and the Indian in general presents a peculiar background to the growth of Indian nationalism. It was under the conditions of political subjection that the British introduced for its own purposes certain changes which introduced new social forces which radically changed the economic structure of the Indian society. It established in particular

- (a) a centralised state (with a modern civil service, centralised administration, a judiciary based on English common law substantially, new land ownership laws, the zamindari system etc.)

- (b) modern education including in western sciences (with the establishment of universities and colleges)
- (c) modern means of transport and communication (postal system, railways, roads etc)
- (d) the modern printing press
- (e) mechanised machine based industries

and it is the combination of these very social forces along with its character of exploitation which emerged under the part of the British rule and became the basis of the rise and development of Indian nationalism.

A.R. Desai comments that the 'extreme social and religious divisions of the Hindus in particular and the Indians in general presented a peculiar background to the growth of nationalism in India'. He brilliantly comments further as follows:

'Nationalism in other countries did not rise amidst such peculiar powerful traditions and institutions. India's peculiar social, economic and political structure and religious history, together with its territorial vastness and a teeming population, make the study of the rise and growth of Indian nationalism more difficult, but more interesting and useful also. The self-preservative will of the past social, economic and cultural structure was stronger in India than in perhaps any country in the world. Further, the significance of the Indian nationalist movement for the present and future history of humanity is also great since it is the movement, increasingly becoming dynamic, of an appreciable section of the human race. Another very striking thing about Indian nationalism is that it emerged under conditions of political subjection of the Indian people by the British. The advanced British nation, for its own purposes, radically changed the economic structure of Indian society, established a centralised state, and introduced modern education, modern means of communication, and other institutions. This resulted in the growth of new social classes and the unleashing of new social forces unique in themselves. These social forces by their very nature came into conflict with British Imperialism and became the basis of and provided motive power for the rise and development of Indian nationalism.....thus Indian nationalism has grown and is developing in a complex and peculiar social background.' (Source: A.R. Desai, 'Social Background of Indian Nationalism', pp. 5-6)

The Colonial Approach

In many ways India had never been a nation until the British had come and ruled us for centuries. In a land as vast and inhabited by a population as large and as varied as India's, the process of the growth of Indian nationalism has been very complex and many-sided. The Indian population spoke many languages, followed many religions and sects (within a religion) and the population of the most populous faith, Hindus, was divided along caste lines.

Thus many thinkers, particularly many British historians, have taken the view that Indian could not have seen the development of nationalism and become one united nation unless the British had come and established (as they did) a colony by uniting the nation into one administrative whole.

Why India wasn't readily regarded as a nation by such thinkers is partly due to the definition of a nation that was propounded by them as is evident from the following classic British definition of a 'nation' by British historian E.H. Carr:

'...the term nation has been used to denote a human group with the following characteristics:

- (a) The idea of a common government whether as a reality in the present or past or as an aspiration of the future.
- (b) A certain size and closeness of contact between all its individual members.
- (c) A more or less defined territory.
- (d) Certain characteristics (of which the most frequent is language) clearly distinguishing the nation from other nations and non-national groups.
- (e) Certain interests common to the individual members.
- (f) A certain degree of common feeling or will, associated with a picture of the nation in the minds of the individual members' (Source: E.H. Carr (Chairman, Study Group of the British Government), *NATIONALISM*, 1939 [quoted in R.P. Dutt, p.2])

It is evident from the above definition, that India could hardly have been called a nation by them when they arrived. In fact the early British imperialists before any sort of national fervour had made a beginning were convinced that India wasn't one. Sir John Strachey said in 1888 that "...there is not and never was an India.....this is the first and most essential thing to learn about India --- that there is not and never was an India or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious: no Indian nation, no 'people of India', of which we hear so much...". (Source: Sir John Strachey, *'India: its administration and progress'*, 1888, p.5)

Frankly it is not surprising the Britishers found it difficult to mentally cope with the idea of a national India even as late as the 1930s when the Simon Commission's Report was published. Even as late as the 1930s the British were holding on to their belief that India was somehow being held and governed by them and without them would break into pieces. But in reality that nationalist conception among the masses had set in. Even a liberal left wing leader like H.W. Nevinson commented for instance in a socialist journal post the publication of the survey attached to the report as follows (in the socialist journal the *New Leader*):

"The almost insuperable difficulty of constructing (not criticising) a constitution or form of government to suit a minor continent including 560 native Indian States (nominally independent), races of 222 separate languages, people of two main and hostile religions (168000000 Hindus and 60000000 Moslems in British India alone), 10000000 out-casted or 'depressed' populations, also called 'Untouchables'....Everyone who thinks of India ought to know these bare facts to start with. If he does not, he should read Vol. 1 of the Report. If he neither knows nor reads, let him hold his peace." Of course this view was superficial because it did not look at what might have led to the creation as it were of a certain cohesion that rapidly led to the emergence of a national consciousness slowly but surely.

British scholars like L.F. Rushbrook Williams whom R.P. Dutt has described as one of the 'modern imperialist apologists' had tried to suggest that it was the civilised British reign itself and its modernising and influence that contributed to the creation of a national consciousness. They have suggested that Indian educated by the British in the democratic liberal ways of English history and its gradual acquisition of popular liberties impressed British trained and educated Indians who then as the next step demanded or started wishing for the same standards for themselves and for the Indian people.

But R.P. Dutt comments refuting this analytical position as follows:

"The democratic evolution of the modern age, which developed in many lands, including England as one of its earliest homes, is not the peculiar patent of England. Nor is it correct that it requires the alien domination of a country in order to implant the seeds of democratic revolution.

The American Declaration of Independence, and still more the great French Revolution with its gospel of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, far more than the already ageing English parliamentary-monarchical compromise, were the great inspirers of the democratic movement of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 have performed a corresponding role as the signal and starting point of the awakening of the peoples, and especially of the awakening consciousness of the subject peoples of Asia and all the colonial countries to the claim of national freedom.....That the Indian awakening has developed in unison with these world currents can be demonstrated from the stages of its growth. It is worth recalling that Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian nationalism in the first half of the Nineteenth century, when he made the voyage to England in 1830, insisted, at considerable inconvenience, in travelling on a French ship to demonstrate his enthusiasm for the principles of the French Revolution. The National Congress, which was originally instituted under official inspiration as an intended instrument against the rising movement of the people and to safeguard British rule, slept for twenty years, and first awakened from its slumbers in the great popular ferment and stirring after 1905, then again, when the revolutionary wave had subsided settled down to placid loyalist moderation, and once again, on a still more overwhelming scale, swept forward with the world revolutionary movement after 1917....The notion that Indian could have had no part in these world currents or pressed forward to the fight for national and democratic freedom, without the interposition of England, is fatuous self-complacency. On the contrary, the example of China has shown how far more powerfully that national democratic impulse has been able to advance and gain ground where imperialism had not been able to establish any complete previous domination; and this national democratic movement of liberation has had to struggle continuously against the obstacles imposed by imperialist aggression and penetration." (Source: *India Today*, R. Palme Dutt, Manisha, Calcutta, 1970, p. 302)

The colonial approach had the support of the British authorities and many viceroys argued in public taking this position. They wished to emphasis the benevolent effect of the British rule and many of them genuinely believed what they said. The imperialist or colonial approach was theorised for the first time by Bruce T. McCully, an American scholar, in 1940. The liberal academic structure to this approach was developed by Reginald Coupland and after 1947 by Percival Spear who argued the British proved their benevolent intentions by ultimately agreeing to grant India independence which they could have easily refused and held on. A new group of neo-traditionalist historians who are referred to as the Cambridge School with prominent thinkers being Anil Seal, J A Callaghar, Judith Brown and others have also argued along essentially adopting the colonial approach when they have argued that India was not even a 'nation-in-making' but a conglomeration of castes, religious and ethnic communities and linguistic groups of masses. They have argued the national movement was basically a forum for the various divisions to compete for favours and to strengthen their own positions and pursue their narrow communities. The basic contradiction between the interests of the Indian people and the British rulers that led to the rise of the Indian national movement is denied by them. They also vehemently deny or refuse to accept that the economic, social, cultural and political development of India required the overthrow of colonialism. They do not agree that India was in the process of unfolding into a nation and insist India was just a conglomeration of castes and communities. The nationalism that was expressed was merely a cover for political organisations who were formed basically along caste and community lines and were competing with each for favours and gains from the state. Anil Seal of the Imperialist writes: 'What from a distance appear as their political strivings were often, on close examination, their efforts to conserve or improve the position of their own prescriptive groups'. (Source: *Anil Seal, The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, p. 342)

The colonial approach ignores the effects of war, inflation, disease, drought, depression etc as causative factors in the rise of Indian nationalism not to mention spiritual and other reasons and the kinship of religious culture that existed between peoples from different regions who spoke different languages but shared similar religious beliefs.

The school of analysis that adopts the colonial approach has argued the Indian national movement was a cover for the struggle for power between various sections of the Indian elite, and between them and the foreign elite.

The Marxist Approach

The Marxist approach can be said to have been pioneered by R. Palme Dutt and later by A.R. Desai but many others have contributed. The Marxist approach recognises the contradiction and conflict that developed between the interests of the Indian people and the British rulers and see that as the principal reason for the development of nationalism but they also recognise the inner contradictions and conflict of interests between the various economic classes. They highlight and bring out the difference in the interests of the Indian rich elite and the poorer classes and integrate that into that into their analysis of the development of Indian nationalism and the resistance to colonialism. They argue the Indian national movement was a movement of the bourgeois basically. Indeed while agreeing with the nationalist analysis that the British rule resulted in mass poverty because of the exploitative destruction of the rural economy of agriculture and handicrafts they also see it as having caused some good as it also caused a structural transformation of the Indian society by destroying the feudal systems and modes of production and replaced that by a capitalist machine led mode of production. Thus the feudal caste and class hierarchies of the villages were weakened, and new classes emerged in Indian society particularly as people migrated to the cities to work in factories. Also a new state structure was created based on a new administrative and judicial system of the English. Prof. Irfan Habib has put it thus:

'The unification of the country on an economic plane by the construction of railways and the introduction of the telegraph in the latter half of the nineteenth century, undertaken for its own benefit by the colonial regime, and the centralisation of the administration which the new modes of communications and transport made possible, played their part in making Indians view India as a prospective single political entity. Modern education (undertaken in a large part by indigenous effort) and the rise of the press disseminated the ideas of India's nationhood and the need for constitutional reform. A substantive basis for India's nationhood was laid when nationalists like Dadabhoy Naoroji (*Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, 1901) and R.C. Dutt (*Economic History of India*, 2 vols., 1901 and 1903) raised the issues of poverty of the Indian people and the burden of colonial exploitation, which was felt in equal measure throughout India.

We see, then, that three complex processes enmeshed to bring about the emergence of India as a nation: the preceding notion of India as a country, the influx of modern political ideas, and the struggle against colonialism. The last was decisive: the creation of the Indian nation can well be said to be one major achievement of the national movement.' (Source: Irfan Habib, *'The nation that is India'*, *The Little Magazine*, Vol III : issue 2)

The imperialist exploitation of India for instance and the role of the British finance-capital (business groups like Andrew Yule and Jardine Skinner), of the profits made by the British ruling class and the common misery of the people as a consequence of that exploitation and the

struggles that that misery inevitably led to among the masses irrespective of religious or racial divisions and the ruthless suppression of those struggles by the British administration all combined and added up and piled up over the years to cause the birth and growth of a national consciousness among the Indian people. During the British colonial rule, first under East India Company and subsequently under the British government from 1858 onwards, the Indian people entered into a period of severe repression and exploitation. There were a number of peasant rebellions, which was prominent in the history of eighteenth-century India. There were of course a large number of famines.

R. Palme. Dutt himself summarises the rise of Indian nationalism as follows:

“The Indian National Movement arose from social conditions, from the conditions of imperialism and its system of exploitation, and from the social and economic forces generated within Indian society under the conditions of that exploitation; the rise of the Indian bourgeoisie and its growing competition against the domination of the British bourgeoisie were inevitable, whatever the system of education....” (Source: R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, 1947, p. 303, Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India)

The Marxist approach sees the natural uprising of the poor in reaction to British exploitation having been usurped by the elite bourgeois leadership that developed particularly in the Congress.

The Marxist approach has been criticised for having ignored the mass aspects of the national movement and the emotive religious and cultural aspects and reactions. Professor Bipan Chandra (and others) for instance have commented: ‘They see the bourgeoisie as playing the dominant role in the movement – they tend to equate or conflate the national leadership with the bourgeoisie or capitalist class. They also interpret the class character of the movement in terms of its forms of struggle (i.e., in its non-violent character) and in the fact that it made strategic retreats and compromises’. (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 22)

The nationalist approach has many variations but broadly lies in treating the rise of nationalism in the context of colonial exploitation and the deep rooted cultural heritages and social identities. They see the rise of nationalism as a coming into conflict between the interests of the colonial rulers and the entire people of a nation and deny the role of internal contradictions between classes. They also see nationalism as being based on the deep cultural identities and totally deny the Marxist analysis based on class interests of the Indian elite colliding with that of that of the British elite on the one hand and the rise of the poorer classes as a consequence of economic misery and exploitation. They reject the theory that the Indian National Congress represented the interests of the upper classes and the Indian bourgeois elite and was not a mass movement. According to the nationalist analysis all classes and the whole of the mass of the Indian peoples were involved in the struggle for independence in the national movement. They also reject that India was not a nation.

The first people to adopt the nationalist approach in the context of India could be said to have been the early leaders like Surendranath Banerjee, Lokmanya Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal etc who it seems on the one hand addressed the British and on the other the Indian people. To the British they sought to falsify their claim that colonized people were culturally incapable of ruling themselves in the conditions of modern world and were not a nation and would break apart if they British held them in one unit. To the Indian people they sought to convince that ‘modernization’ was possible while retaining the cultural identity of the various religious faiths and castes and communities. It may be remembered in this context there had always been deep suspicions in many conservative sections that the British in the name of modernisation were

really intent on destroying Indian culture. Some religious and social reformers like Swami Vivekananda and later Swami Dayanand also supported the idea of an Indian nation embracing western science and technology but rooted and operating from a philosophical and ideological centre based in the teachings of the ancient Vedas and Upanishads.

Thus the nationalists produced a discourse that while on the one hand challenging the colonial justification for British political domination accepted the need for 'modernity' in the western sense and on which colonial domination was substantially based.

It has been argued by some scholars that the development of a nationalist consciousness happened as part of a historical process triggered by the national movement which to begin with was anti-colonial but later was deeply national. Professor Bipan Chandra (and others) have in this context commented: 'The national movement also played a pivotal role in the historical process through which the Indian people got formed into a nation or a people. National leaders from Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjea and Tilak to Gandhiji and Nehru accepted that India was not yet a fully structured nation but a nation-in-the-making and that one of the major objectives and functions of the movement was to promote the growing unity of the Indian people through a common struggle against colonialism. In other words, the national movement was seen both as a product of the process of the nation-in-the-making and as an active agent of the process. This process of the nation-in-the making was never *counter-posed* to the diverse regional, linguistic and ethnic identities in India. On the contrary, the emergence of a national identity and the flowering of other narrower identities were seen as processes deriving strength from each other'. (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 23)

On the very concept of nationalism in general (and not merely the development of nationalism in India) some of the nationalist approaches have been quite novel and different from each other.

J Anthony Smith has argued there is a 'core doctrine of nationalism' which includes and fuses three ideals: (a) collective self determination of the people, (b) the expression of the national character and individuality and (c) the vertical division of the world into unique nations each contributing its special genius to the common fund of humanity.ohn

Plamenatz has said nationalism is a cultural phenomenon which takes a political form by the acceptance of a common set of standards by which the state of development of a particular national culture is measured.

Generally thus in the nationalist approach it is assumed homogeneity between people in a group leads to the birth of a nation constituting that group into a nation. But Gellner has said: 'it is not the case that nationalism imposes homogeneity, it is rather that a homogeneity imposed by objective, inescapable imperative eventually appears on the surface in the form of nationalism'. The objective inescapable imperative that Gellner refers to is the cultural homogeneity that he argued is the as an essential concomitant of the industrial society that evolves from the growth of industrial capitalism. Gellner also argued, nationalism though it may define and identify itself in the name of a folk culture or original culture of a particular people it may actually be just an imposition of a high culture on society. To Gellner it does not matter if the high culture is alien imposed by outsiders or imported. Gellner's position is thus : 'nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist'.

Anderson in his study of nationalism has found usually a historically political community always existed before cultural systems of religious community and the development of dynastic realm. He sees a major role of printing press and the spread of Christianity particularly Protestantism which fundamentally changed modes of apprehending the world and made it possible to think of the 'nation'. He has argued what made the new communities possible was interaction between system of production and productive relations (capitalism), technology of communication (print) and the fatality of human linguistic diversity by which he meant the tendency of diverse linguistic groups of not staying together as one nation. He argued three distinct models of nationalism appeared: 'creole nationalism' where the vertical identities were transformed to the horizontal identities because economic interests of certain classes clashed and the ideological criticism of imperialism strengthened the spread of that identity, 'linguistic nationalism' of kind that was seen in Europe and 'official nationalism' typically of the type seen in Russia where there was imposition of cultural homogeneity from the top, through state action.

The Subaltern Approach

The subaltern approach or school is the most recent and was mainly developed by historian Ranajit Guha who had been deeply influenced by the writings of Gramsci, an Italian thinker. Subsequently others like Partho Chatterjee and Sumit Sarkar also did notable work following this approach. The Subaltern Studies Collective, founded in 1982, was begun with the goal of establishing a new critique of both colonialist and nationalist perspectives in the historiography of colonized countries. They focused on the course of 'subaltern history' or the history of ordinary people by studying peasant revolts, popular insurgencies etc to the complex processes of domination and subordination in a variety of the changing institutions and practices of evolving modernity. They examined institutions such as colonial law and colonial prisons, popular notions of kinship and disease, the position of women in colonial society, popular memories of anti-colonial and sectarian violence etc.

The subaltern approach seeks to study the development of history and the evolution of Indian nationalism from the viewpoint of subordinate masses like poor peasants, tribals, women, untouchables and other *non-elite* powerless dispossessed sections of Indian society. They argued Indian society had always been divided into *the elite* and *the subaltern*. There had always existed a fundamental contradiction between the interests of these two groups. They argued history had always been studied and recorded or written for posterity from the point of view of the elite dominant classes and groups. They also argued there was no real conflict of interest between the Indian elite (or the elite of Indian origin like zamindars and industrialists) and the British elite (whether business or bureaucratic) and the Indian National Congress was only a cover under which the real battle for power was being fought by the competing elite groups. It was actually the subaltern groups who were the real victims of colonial rule and many of the Indian elite actually gained. The subaltern groups reacted by launching various small relatively unknown and un-celebrated revolts all over the country whereas it was only the role of the Indian National Congress and elitist movements like that were assumed to have been the main constituents of the national movement. They argued there was a great need to study and analyse the role and contribution of these political and social rebellions and eruptions.

The subaltern school rested their analytical structure on some Gramscian concepts: (a) that the state is a combination of official coercion plus elite hegemony and (b) there is a struggle for power for this hegemony or domination and for assuming the moral and intellectual leadership of the new evolving nation which (c) would be in the nature of a kind of '*passive revolution*' of the

owners of capital and productive resources. For in situations where the emerging bourgeois does not have the social conditions to establish complete hegemony over the new nation, it resorts to passive revolution by attempting a '*molecular transformation*' of the old dominant classes into partners in a new historical bloc and only partially appropriate the popular masses, in order to first create a state as a necessary precondition for the establishment of capitalism as a dominant mode of production. Since frontal attack on the state is not possible hence they resort to a struggle for positions, ideological political positioning etc.

The subaltern thinkers like Partho Chatterjee have argued in the context of the Indian national movement the new powerful native Indian classes that emerged tried to assert their intellectual moral leadership over a modernizing Indian nation and stake its claim to power in opposition to the British colonial masters. That is the analytical approach followed by the subaltern thinkers in understanding the Indian national movement and the growth of nationalism in India. As Ranajit Guha puts it: "The domain of politics was 'structurally split' – not unified, homogenous, as elite interpretations of nationalism and nation-state had made it out to be....What is clearly left out in this un-historical [elitist] historiography is the *politics of the people*. For parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principle actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring populations and intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people. This was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from the elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. (Source: Guha, Ranajit., *Subaltern Studies I*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, p4)

The subaltern thinkers argue recognizing the structural split between elite and subaltern is fundamental to the study of colonial history, politics and culture in India. The subalterns also reject the 'spurious claims' by Indian elite readings of nationalism as people's consent to a rule of their 'own' bourgeoisie in the anti-colonial movements led by the Indian nationalist elite. They provide empirical evidence to claim "how on one occasion after another and in region after region the initiative of such campaigns passed from elite leaderships to the mass of subaltern participants,, who defied high command and headquarters to make these struggles their own by framing them in codes specific to traditions of popular resistance and phrasing them in idioms derived from the communitarian experience of working and living together". (Source; *Ibid.*)

Ranajit Guha concludes: "The co-existence of these two domains or streams, which can be sensed by intuition and proved by demonstrations as well, was the index of an important historical truth, that is, the *failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation*." (Source: *Ibid.* pp. 5-6)

EXERCISE

1. Distinguish between the various approaches to the study of colonialism and nationalism.

SUGGESTED READING

1. Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies Series*, Delhi. Oxford University Press.

LESSON 2

THE EARLY PHASE OF COLONIALISM AND ITS IMPACT

Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The establishment and consolidation of British political rule in India
- Its impact on the economy and society

India is a land which is vast and inhabited by a large and varied population. Hence the process of the growth of Indian nationalism has been very complex and many-sided. The Indian population at the time the British arrived and gradually began to establish their political control, spoke many languages, followed many religions and sects (sub group within a religion) and the population of the most populous faith, Hindus, were divided along caste lines. A.R. Desai comments that the 'extreme social and religious divisions of the Hindus in particular and the Indians in general presented a peculiar background to the growth of nationalism in India'. He further observes:

'Nationalism in other countries did not rise amidst such peculiar powerful traditions and institutions. India's peculiar social, economic and political structure and religious history, together with its territorial vastness and a teeming population, make the study of the rise and growth of Indian nationalism more difficult, but more interesting and useful also. The self-preservative will of the past social, economic and cultural structure was stronger in India than in perhaps any country in the world. Further, the significance of the Indian nationalist movement for the present and future history of humanity is also great since it is the movement, increasingly becoming dynamic, of an appreciable section of the human race. Another very striking thing about Indian nationalism is that it emerged under conditions of political subjection of the Indian people by the British. The advanced British nation, for its own purposes, radically changed the economic structure of Indian society, established a centralised state, and introduced modern education, modern means of communication, and other institutions. This resulted in the growth of new social classes and the unleashing of new social forces unique in themselves. These social forces by their very nature came into conflict with British Imperialism and became the basis of and provided motive power for the rise and development of Indian nationalism.....thus Indian nationalism has grown and is developing in a complex and peculiar social background.' (Source: A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, pp. 5-6)

Why India wasn't readily to be regarded as a nation is evident from the following classic British definition of 'nation' by E.H. Carr which could also be said to be the view as per the colonialist: '...the term nation has been used to denote a human group with the following characteristics:

- (a) The idea of a common government whether as a reality in the present or past or as an aspiration of the future.
- (b) A certain size and closeness of contact between all its individual members.
- (c) A more or less defined territory.
- (d) Certain characteristics (of which the most frequent is language) clearly distinguishing the nation from other nations and non-national groups.

(e) Certain interests common to the individual members.

(f) A certain degree of common feeling or will, associated with a picture of the nation in the minds of the individual members' (Source: E.H. Carr (Chairman, Study Group of the British Government), *NATIONALISM*, 1939 (quoted in *Ibid*, p.2))

It is evident from the above definition that the British formulated, that India could hardly have been called a nation. In fact the early British imperialists before any sort of national fervour had made a beginning were convinced that India wasn't one. Sir John Strachey said in 1888 that "...there is not and never was an India.....this is the first and most essential thing to learn about India --- that there is not and never was an India or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious: no Indian nation, no 'people of India', of which we hear so much...". (Source: R. Palme Dutt, '*India Today*', 1947, p. 303, Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India)

R.P. Dutt summarises the rise of Indian nationalism as follows:

"The Indian National Movement arose from social conditions, from the conditions of imperialism and its system of exploitation, and from the social and economic forces generated within Indian society under the conditions of that exploitation; the rise of the Indian bourgeoisie and its growing competition against the domination of the British bourgeoisie were inevitable, whatever the system of education; and if the Indian bourgeoisie had been educated only in the Sanskrit Vedas, in monastic seclusion from every other current of thought, they would have assuredly found in the Sanskrit Vedas the inspiring principles and slogans of their struggle." (Source: R. Palme Dutt, '*India Today*', 1947, p. 303, Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India)

British scholars like L.F. Rushbrook Williams whom R.P. Dutt has described as one of the 'modern imperialist apologists' had tried to suggest that it was the civilised British reign itself and its modernising influence that contributed to the creation of a national consciousness. They have suggested that Indians educated by the British in the democratic liberal ways of the English as the next step demanded the same standards for themselves and the Indian people in every sense. But R.P. Dutt undermines and refutes this theory as follows:

"The democratic evolution of the modern age, which developed in many lands, including England as one of its earliest homes, is not the peculiar patent of England. Nor is it correct that it requires the alien domination of a country in order to implant the seeds of democratic revolution. The American Declaration of Independence, and still more the great French Revolution with its gospel of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, far more than the already ageing English parliamentary-monarchical compromise, were the great inspirers of the democratic movement of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917 have performed a corresponding role as the signal and starting point of the awakening of the peoples, and especially of the awakening consciousness of the subject peoples of Asia and all the colonial countries to the claim of national freedom.....That the Indian awakening has developed in unison with these world currents can be demonstrated from the stages of its growth. It is worth recalling that Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Indian nationalism in the first half of the Nineteenth century, when he made the voyage to England in 1830, insisted, at considerable inconvenience, in travelling on a French ship to demonstrate his enthusiasm for the principles of the French Revolution. The National Congress, which was originally instituted under official inspiration as an intended instrument against the rising movement of the people and to safeguard

British rule, slept for twenty years, and first awakened from its slumbers in the great popular ferment and stirring after 1905, then again, when the revolutionary wave had subsided settled down to placid loyalist moderation, and once again, on a still more overwhelming scale, swept forward with the world revolutionary movement after 1917...The notion that India could have had no part in these world currents or pressed forward to the fight for national and democratic freedom, without the interposition of England, is fatuous self-complacency. On the contrary, the example of China has shown how far more powerfully that national democratic impulse has been able to advance and gain ground where imperialism had not been able to establish any complete previous domination; and this national democratic movement of liberation has had to struggle continuously against the obstacles imposed by imperialist aggression and penetration." (Source: *Ibid.*, p. 302)

The changes in the structure of the Indian economy under the British had a deep and profound influence in shaping and promoting Indian nationalism. It is necessary to examine what were the changes and how it inevitably led to the unifying of the struggling people along nationalist lines.

Indian agriculture was transformed by the arrival of the British. The Indian village, where the agricultural population lived and worked had been a marvel of a social organisation of sorts with a self-sufficient economic basis and this very interestingly had remained unchanged over centuries and millennia whatever and whoever by turns ruled India. The village set up had survived all political convulsions, religious upheavals and devastating wars. It had stood unchanged and unperturbed essentially even as foreign invasions, dynastic changes, violent territorial gains and losses in struggles between states and kingdoms went on. Sir Charles Metcalfe had cutely put it to and for the British as follows:

'The village communities are little republics having nearly everything that they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last within themselves where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution; Hindu, Pathan, Mogul, Maratha, Sikh, English are all masters in turn; but the village communities remain the same'

Structurally, on the whole with regional variations, the village committee was the owner of the village land and distributed this land among the peasant families in the form of holdings. Each holding was cultivated by the peasant family to which it was allotted collectively and that family enjoyed a hereditary right to possess and cultivate that holding from generation to generation.

All families in the village were subject to some self-imposed restrictions by the village and entitled to various collectively managed services like sanitation, watch and ward etc., rights to common grazing grounds and woodlands, common sources of irrigation and water supply etc, common defensive measures against marauders and dacoits and wild animals and pests etc. Life in the village consequently necessitated a regime of co-operation to be imposed on all, that tempered and prevented any tendency for the development of antagonistic and irreconcilable private claims. The agricultural produce of the village was for the needs of the village and excepting for a share of it that had to be sent to the king emperor or his intermediary, usually a *jagirdar*, the entire produce was consumed by the peasants and the non-peasant village population. The non-peasant population included smiths, carpenters, potters, weavers, cobblers, washermen, oilmen, barbers and others. They all worked to satisfy the needs of the closed village community. The exchange of products produced by the village community of workers –

agricultural or industrial – was limited to the village community and hence restricted in scope. Shelvankar has commented on the nature of this exchange as follows:

‘It is, however, not strictly accurate to say that there was exchange between individuals. For, while the peasants individually went to the artisans as and when they needed his services, the payment he received in return was not calculated on the basis of each job nor was it offered him by each customer(or client) separately. This obligation was borne by the village as a whole, which discharged it by permanently assigning to the craftsmen a piece of land belonging to the community and/or the gift of a fixed measure of grain at harvest time. Thus the other party to the exchange was the collective organization of the village as much as the individual peasant, and the artisan was not merely a private producer but a sort of public servant employed by the rural community.’ (Source: K.S. Shelvankar, *‘The Problem of India’*, p.102 (quoted in A.R. Desai, *‘Social background of Indian Nationalism’*, p. 10))

The British under the rule of the East India Company for the first time introduced property in land and destroyed the communal ownership of land of the Indian village, a system and tradition of thousands of years by introducing first the Zaminadri system and later the Ryotwari system. By the Permanent Land Settlement of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1793, Lord Cornwallis converted the tax farmers or revenue collectors who had been appointed by the predecessors of the British and who collected tax on commission basis into landlords or zamindars. Under the terms of the settlement they were made lords of their areas pretty much like the lord of the manors that the English feudal aristocracy was familiar with from the own county’s tradition and history and Lords like Cornwallis were members of the aristocracy. All the landlords had to do was to make a fixed payment to the government of the East India Company based on the area of the land under their command and not the quantum of produce. The East India Company also created a group of landlords out of the military petty chiefs from the past by taking over their military, political and administrative powers and converting their earlier ‘tributes’ into revenue of their government. Some persons who had aided them militarily or otherwise were gifted land and made landlords. Later when the British found that it was economically disadvantageous to have fixed permanent revenue from the landlords, the new land settlements were introduced on a temporary basis. While the landlords created under the temporary land settlements were given proprietary rights over land, the revenue they had to pay to the government could be subsequently revised. The Permanent Zamindari Settlements prevailed in Bengal, Bihar and sections of North Madras and in total covered about 20 per cent of the British Indian territory. The Temporary Zemindari Settlements covered the major portion of the United provinces, certain zones of Bengal and Bombay, the Central Provinces, and the Punjab and constituted about 30 per cent of the British Indian territory. In 1820, Sir Thomas Munro introduced the Ryotwari system in Madras, where he was Governor because he felt that the landlord system was alien to Indian tradition. Under this system the individual cultivator was transformed into the owner of the land he tilled. The Ryotwari system was subsequently extended to a number of other provinces. The Ryotwari settlements, were also introduced in Bombay, Sind, Berar, Madras, Assam, and some other areas together constituting 51 per cent of British Indian territory. A.R. Desai comments on these systems as follows:

‘Considering that the Ryotwari like the Zemindari was based on private property in land which was unknown to pre-British India, it was as much exotic to the Indian tradition as the Zemindari. Both were points of departure from the traditional Indian economy, which excluded the economic category of individual private ownership of land.....thus private property in land came into being into India. Land became private property, a commodity in the market, which could be mortgaged, purchased or sold. Thus the British conquest of India brought about an

agrarian revolution. It created the prerequisites for the capitalist ownership of land, namely, peasant ownership and large-scale landlord ownership. This, together with the commercial and other new economic forces which invaded and penetrated the village of India of the pre-British period. This transformation of the land relations was the most vital link in the chain of causes which transformed the whole pre-capitalist feudal economy of India into the existing capitalist economy. The profound social, political, cultural and psychological results of this material transformation of Indian society will be described subsequently.' (A.R. Desai, 'Social background' of *Indian Nationalism*, pp. 40-41)

The most important change which affected the agricultural sector though was the change in the system of collection of land revenue. Before the British when the village ownership of land was recognised, the village was taken as the unit of assessment and the village community through the headman or the *panchayat* paid the state or the intermediary a specific proportion of the annual agricultural produce as revenue. This proportion may have varied under different kings or dispensations, but it was, excepting in rare cases, the village which was the unit of assessment and the payer of revenue. The British of course destroyed this system and made the individual holders of land the unit of assessment and responsible for paying revenue. Even more debilitating than this change was the new method of calculating revenue. Villagers had previously always paid a specific portion of their annual produce as revenue and hence it varied from year to year depending on the quantum of the crop. But the British introduced a system of fixed money payments, assessed on the size of the land, which was regularly due in cash irrespective of the annual production of the individual landholder.

This new system of calculating land revenue and taxes had severe consequences. Previously the possession of land had never been under threat because of failure of the crop etc or any other reason. If during any year the harvest failed, the land revenue for that year used to be zero since the revenue was always a proportion of the actual realized harvest and so there were no consequences for non-payment on the village, which was the joint or communal owner of the village land. But under the new system introduced by the British since the landlord or peasant proprietor had to meet the fixed annual payment irrespective of the failure of the crop, he often had no alternative but to go in for the mortgage and sale of land. A.R Desai comments on these changes as follows:

'When a land holder could not pay the land revenue due to the state out of the returns of his harvest or his resources, he was constrained to mortgage or sell his land. Thus, insecurity of possession and ownership of land – a phenomenon unknown to the pre-British agrarian society – came into existence. The new land system disastrously affected the communal character of the village, its self-sufficient economy and communal social life.....Under the new land system, the village was no longer the owner of land hence no longer also the superintendent of agriculture. The individual landholder was directly connected with the centralised state to which he owed his proprietary right over land and had directly to pay the land revenue. Further, all land disputes were now settled, not by village panchayats, but by the courts established by the centralised state. This undermined the prestige of the panchayats, now shorn of power.....Thus the new system not only deprived the village of its agricultural-economic functions but also led to the loss of its judicial functions. It also broke the bonds which organically tied the village peasant to the village collective.....The organs of the centralised state took over almost all essential functions relating to the village life which were previously performed by the self-governing village organisation.....Since the fulfilment of village needs

was the objective of the village production and produce, both industrial and agricultural, in pre-British India, this objective determined the character of this produce and production. It was on this basis that the unity of the village agricultural and industry was possible and built and their balance maintained.' (Source: *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43)

One of the problems of the new system was that now the farmer and the village population was not producing anymore for self consumption but for the market to sell produce and raise cash to pay revenue and to free himself from the clutches of the money lender into whose hands he had progressively fallen into because in bad years during crop failure or lack of rain there was no alternative but to borrow from the moneylender to pay off taxes. So naturally this led to a certain commercialisation of agriculture and new crops like cotton, jute, wheat, sugarcane and oil seeds began to be cultivated much of which could be sold because they were needed as raw materials for the industries of England. A.R. Desai says that from 'the standpoint of the growth of a single national Indian or world economy, this was a step forward in spite of the annihilation of self-sufficient village communities and economic misery consequent on this destruction through the capitalist transformation of the Indian economy.....It contributed towards building the material foundation, namely, the economic welding together of India and of India with the world, for the national consolidation of the Indian people and the international economic unification of the world'. He further comments on the change as follows:

'.....It is true that the capitalist transformation of the village economy was brought about by the destruction of village co-operation but its historical progressive role lies in the fact that it broke the self-sufficiency of the village economic life and made the village economy a part of the unified national economy. It was a historically necessary step towards integrating the Indian people economically. It simultaneously broke the physical, social and cultural isolation of the village people by creating the possibility of large scale social exchange through the establishment of such means of mass transport as railways and automobiles.

How could a united nation evolve out of a people who are living an isolated existence in numerous centres, who are physically divided and between whom there is very little social and economic exchange? . How can the consciousness of a people be elevated to a national plane when they live independent isolated lives in small groups? Conditions of material existence determine the nature of consciousness and the conditions of narrow material existence in the self-sufficient village could give birth in the mass, only to the village consciousness. With rare exceptions, the population in the bulk could not transcend the village outlook and village consciousness under the conditions of life in the hermetically sealed village.....but the capitalist transformation of India based on the destruction of village autarchy and co-operation on the narrow village scale paved the way for higher forms of economy and social collaboration.....it paved the way for a national economy and nation-scale collaboration among the Indian people.....it became the material premise for the emergence of the Indian nation out of the amorphous mass of the Indian people which, before this unification, were scattered in numerous villages between which there was very little exchange, social or economic, and, hence, which had hardly any positive common interests.....however tragic, the destruction of the autarchic village and the collective life of the people living in it, it was historically necessary for the economic, social and political unification of the Indian people. Social progress is achieved, as history shows, through the amoral action of historical forces.' (Source: *Ibid.*, pp. 45-49)

Apart from the rise of commercial and national agriculture, gradually the indebtedness of the farmer everywhere began to rise as a consequence of the combined effect of fixed land revenue that had to be paid to the government and droughts etc, which inevitably forced farmers to borrow from money lenders. When the farmers could not pay back their debts they had to

fragment their land and start selling it or surrendering it to the money lender and/or landlords who were often the same person because the debts were usually against the collateral of the land. This led to the rise of huge fragmentation of land and the resulting drop in productivity. Eventually many peasant proprietors lost all their land and had to turn into agricultural labourers or landless labourers. It was estimated that eventually as much as half the population became landless and constituted a new class of agricultural proletariat. Slowly therefore there was a huge increase on the one hand of a land less agricultural labourer class of proletariats and on the other a parasitic land owning class who were not cultivators. They were just owners and rent seekers of their huge and ever increasing land holdings as more and more poor farmers lost land holdings to them, unable to bear further indebtedness and the need to pay a high fixed land revenue year after year.

Another tragic economic consequence of the rise of British rule was the decline of town handicrafts which happened due to the disappearance of the native Indian royal courts who were their chief patrons, the establishment of an alien foreign rule who were not interested in their prosperity and of course the competition of a more highly developed form of industry which British industry was. The British forced free trade on India and imposed heavy duties on Indian manufactures in England and started the export of raw products from India for processing in England rather than setting up industries in India. Transit and customs duties were imposed to stop flow of Indian industrial goods and British industries were given special privileges. In some cases Indian artisans were compelled to divulge their trade secrets. The beginning of railways meant that raw materials could be transported from any part of India to the ports for shipping to England and manufactured goods from England could be transported to all parts of India. Exhibitions of English goods were held all over the country to promote their adoption. Also the new educated class of Indians, mostly urban professionals took to adopting western goods which further dashed hopes of survival of the town handicrafts because it meant that the royal courts and upper class of earlier times was not replaced by the new bourgeois.

Tragic as it was, the destruction of town handicrafts, also had another effect. The destruction of the pre-capitalist urban handicrafts and the village artisan industry of India brought about by the forces of modern industries and trade had the effect of helping in the transformation of India into a single economic whole. A.R. Desai comments:

'It objectively unified the entire people – and not a section – within the web of a system of exchange relations. It thus contributed to the building of the material basis for the growth of a common and joint economic existence for the Indian people, for the economic integration of the Indian people into a nation'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.90)

Most of these handicraftsmen men became workers in modern industries, factories and transport modes and some became agricultural tenants or landless labourers. A.R. Desai says this 'new class of land labourers or industrial workers or tenants or peasant proprietors had a community of interests and common problems which could not exist among Indian handicraftsmen in pre-British India.....the ruined handicraftsmen now achieved the status of being members of classes which were component parts of the Indian nation and existed as national units with common interests and problems.....this was a distinct historical advance'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.91)

There was another consequence of the socio-economic changes which was the decline of village artisan industries mainly as a consequence of the entry of manufactured goods from Britain. Millions of artisans, craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, tanners and smelters were ruined and they had no alternative but to crowd into agriculture. As a consequence India was

transformed from being a country of combined agriculture and manufacturing , into an agricultural colony of British manufacturing capitalism. The modern industries that came up could not accommodate the ruined artisans because they came up much slowly than the rate at which traditional industries got ruined. A.R. Desai is of the view that historically:

‘..the self sufficient village economy had to be a casualty before the single national economy of the Indian people could come into being. Similarly, the self-sufficient, almost closed existence of the village community had to be shattered before the entire Indian people could be welded into a nation and live a common and historically higher social, political, economic and cultural existence.

The artisans who left their village and became city workers, became members of the working class which, transcending all local and provincial limitations, began to organise on national lines. The ex-artisans developed wider consciousness of being members of the Indian working class. They developed a national outlook also.

Even those sections of the ruined artisans, who bought land and became peasants or who, due to lack of means, became land labourers, developed a different and wider consciousness. Under the new conditions created by the transformation of Indian agriculture, they were not members of an economically self-sufficient village community but formed economically, classes which were integral parts of the Indian nation. Now living under the same system of land laws, the interests of all peasants or land labourers throughout India became more or less identical. The recognition of this stimulated a wider break class and national consciousness among them and prompted them in course of time, to build up or join such organisations as the All India Kisan Sabha and others’. (Source: *Ibid.* p.98)

Modern manufacturing industry had started developing in India from early years of the nineteenth century but by the end of that century Indian industrialist had made a place for themselves particularly in cotton and jute textiles. Very soon Indian industry began to realise how the absence of a level playing field meant that British owned groups always had an advantage. They obviously began to resent this. And a community of interest developed between these economic interests. Many Indian nationalist economists and politicians declared that the substantial British domination of India banking that was one of the most important obstacles to a rapid industrial development of India. Financing for Indian owned industry was almost impossible compared to British owned industry and the British controlled banks and government policies were primarily designed from the point of view of British economic interests. The Indian nationalist economists and Indian industrial interests later proposed the ‘Bombay Plan’ to suggest a change of character of the nature of industrial development. Notwithstanding the insufficient and unbalanced development of industries, industrialization played an almost revolutionary role in the life of the Indian people. A.R. Desai comments it led to the consolidation of the unified national economy. This consolidation happened as a consequence of the introduction of capitalist economic forms in agriculture by the British government, penetration of India by the commercial forces of the world and spread of modern transport during the British rule. He comments that industrialisation made ‘the Indian economy more unified, cohesive and organic.....raised the tone of the economic life of India.....brought into existence modern cities which became the centres of modern culture and increasing democratic social life and from which all progressive movements, social, political and cultural, emanated’. (Source: *Ibid.* p.124)

He further comments as follows:

'The progressive social and political groups in India realized the advantages, direct and indirect, of industrialization. Though they differed in their views regarding the social organisation of industrial and other economic forces and resources whether on the laissez faire principle of private enterprise and unlimited individual competition or on a planned national basis, capitalist or socialist, they all stood for rapid all-sided expansion of industries. While sharply divided on many issues, they put up a united demand for it. They jointly struggled for the removal of the various handicaps on industrial development. The demand for industrialization thus became a national demand.' (Source: *Ibid.* p.124)

Along with industrialization and almost as a part of it there was a rapid growth in the modern means of transport, which it has to be said aided in the growth of national sentiment. Railways and buses made it possible to spread progressive social and scientific ideas among the people and modern means of transport helped spread scientific and progressive literature (books, magazines, papers) which could not have been quickly distributed throughout the country otherwise. Also Railways in particular helped in dissolving orthodox social habits regarding food, physical contact, and others. Both Brahmins and Sudras and touchables and untouchables travelled in the railway compartment if they had paid the same fair.

The spread of modern western British education is undoubtedly another of the great phenomenon that went a long way in ultimately forging a national consciousness. Initially the British government had organised a huge state machinery to run India and a large number of educated people were needed to staff the huge government organisation and such a large number of people could not be sourced from England. So it became necessary to start schools and colleges in India, which would turn out large numbers of usable graduates who could be used to fill the sub-ordinate posts after filling the top posts with the British. Also there was a school of thought among the British, which believed that the British liberal culture of democracy and rule of law was the best in the world and favoured its introduction in India. They also believed that with the introduction of this education and culture worldwide gradually social and political unification of the world could be achieved. Consequently many Britishers like Macaulay were infused with a missionary zeal to spread British education in India. Apart from the need of British imperialism for educated people to run its shop and the missionary zeal of some of its statesmen like Macaulay, the third important factor that played a major role was the enthusiastic adoption by some Indians themselves like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Raja Ram Mohan Roy became the pioneer of progressive modern education in India and hailed the English education as the key to the treasures of scientific and democratic thought of the modern west. He declared that the perpetuation of the traditional systems of education would only perpetuate the old superstitions and regressive lines of social authority. Considering that he lived and worked in the first half of the nineteenth century, nothing as significant was to happen in any part of the country outside Bengal for almost fifty years. He had submitted a memorial to the Governor in 1823 wherein he urged the government to 'promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, chemistry, anatomy, with other useful sciences'. This approach was to much later become the approach of the liberal school in Indian politics which subsequently evolved and which idealised western education and was criticised by other nationalist groups.

The education that the British introduced may have had many defects but it almost certain that it had a great influence in ultimately making the Indian intelligentsia aware of liberal philosophies from all over the world which aided in gradually giving birth to nationalist notions. The British education was secular, liberal and open to all unlike the traditional education

in pre-British times. Also of course the education was in the English language which opened he great rationalist and democratic traditions of western thought to Indians. A.R. Desai comments it is not a 'mere accident that the pioneers and all the subsequent leaders of Indian nationalism came from the educated classes of the Indian society.' The British government was from time to time alarmed at the spread of extreme political ideas among the educated Indians, which they had clearly imbibed from the political literature of Europe due to their knowledge of English. But nationalism was not exactly an offspring of modern education even as it did play its profound role. The national movement later came to have a democratic charter as a result of the influences of the assimilation of modern democratic ideas of the west adopted by our western educated leaders of the national movement. But A.R. Desai points out the real reason for the gradual birth of nationalism was the coming together of interests of the different categories of Indians. He comments as follows:

'Different classes had their specific grievances against Britain. The industrialists desired freedom for unobstructed industrialisation of India and protection for the native industries. The educated classes demanded the Indianization of Services, since the higher posts were mainly the preserve of the British. The agriculturalists demanded reduction of the land tax. The workers demanded better conditions of work and a living wage. The nation as a whole demanded the freedom of association and press, assembly, elected legislatures, representative institutions, dominion status, home rule and finally complete Independence. It was out of these contradictions of interests of Britain and India that Indian nationalism grew'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.159) But A. R. Desai also comments on the importance of the educated Indian in the shaping of the nationalist consciousness as follows:

'The educated Indian, who studied English democratic literature and imbibed its democratic principles, felt inspired to rebel against the reactionary social institutions and world outlook of a bygone era, such as caste and authoritarian social philosophies which sought to enslave the individual and suppress his free initiative. He also thought in terms of a free national existence of the Indian people on a democratic basis. This gave the Indian nationalist movement, the offspring of the colonial status of India under the British rule, a democratic objective. The movement also developed on a democratic basis, on the basis of such principles and methods as election and elected committees and such demands as the widening of franchise, freedom of press, speech and association, representative government, executive responsible to the people, etc'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.161)

The benefits in terms of a nationalist consciousness that was gained from a national economy, modern means of transport and modern education in English, which made it possible for the first time for people from different regional areas to easily communicate with each other, were all the more accentuated by the fact that the British had achieved near total political and administrative unification of the country with one legal system and one currency and tax system.

One benefit of the arrival of modern education and western democratic traditions and modern means of transport and industry was the gradual birth of a free press in India. The press proved to be a powerful factor in building and developing Indian nationalism and the nationalist movement, social, cultural, political, and economic. The press aided the national movement in spreading and popularising among the people the notions of representative government, liberty, democratic institutions, Home Rule, Dominion Status and Independence. The leaders would regularly analyse the latest measures of the British government from the point of view of the Indian people and spread it through to the wider mass of the Indian people through the newspapers and journals that they had started. A.R. Desai comments:

'The Press alone made possible the large scale, swift, and constant exchange of views among different social groups inhabiting various parts of the country. The establishment and extension of the Press in India brought about a closer social and intellectual contact between provincial populations. It also made possible the daily and extensive discussion of programmes of social, political and cultural matters, and the holding of national conferences, social, political, and cultural. National committees were appointed to implement the programmes adopted at these conferences throughout the country. This led to the building of an increasingly rich, complex, social and cultural, existence'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.237)

A remarkable feature of the nineteenth century was that along with the consolidation and establishment of the British rule in India a number of social and religious reform movements came up which were expressions of the rising national consciousness and of the liberal ideas of the west that had begun to be adopted very rapidly at least by the newly educated intelligentsia. These movements had issues like abolition of caste discrimination and untouchability, equal rights for women, child marriage, widow remarriage and crusades against other social and legal inequalities. Also there were religious movements like the Ramakrishna Mission Movement which sought to revive the higher philosophical moorings of Vedantic Hinduism away from superstition, idolatry, polytheism, and hereditary priesthood. All these movements, both social and religious in varying degrees, emphasised and fought for the principles of liberty of the individual and other democratic values even without claiming to do so probably. All these movements clearly helped in fostering the notions of social equality and nationalism.

In the early period of the British rule in the first half of the nineteenth century partly out of their own belief system and partly as a response to the social reform movements the British even as they were carrying out policies that was devastating the economic structures and causing misery all round were performing a progressive role in controlling and even eliminating the conservative and feudal forces of Indian society. They were able to, apart from ruthlessly wiping out the princely states, to carry out reforms like the abolition of sati (which had the full support of Indian reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Derozio), the abolition of slave labour, infanticide, thuggism. They also introduced western education of course and the free press. As a consequence of these policies of the British they endear themselves to the newly educated while at once making the old order their deepest enemies. The old reactionary rulers saw the British as a threat. Some tried to do deals with them but mostly sooner or later realised that the British really were looking to replace them. The revolt of 1857 was substantially a coming together of these forces from the past. As R.P. Dutt comments:

'The rising of 1857 was in its essential character and dominant leadership the revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned potentates for their rights and privileges which they saw in process of destruction. This reactionary character of the rising prevented any wide measure of popular support and doomed it to failure'. (Source: R. Palme Dutt, '*India Today*', 1947, p. 306, Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India)

Merchants, intelligentsia and many Indian rulers kept aloof from the revolt and many actively supported the British. Meetings were organised in Calcutta and Bombay to pray for the success of the British. Many Indian rulers supplied the British with men and materials. Almost half the Indian soldiers in the employment of the British also did not fight or participate in the mutiny but instead fought with the British against their own brothers.

It is interesting to note though that a major section of the *sepoys* who did revolt and joined the mutiny were of farming stock and were deeply influenced by the hardships that their farming brethren faced in the villages due to the new extortionate land revenue system of the British. In fact this along with the many isolated peasant and tribal uprisings that had been happening all

through out did contribute to gradually piling the discontentment and congruence of hardship and misery country wide to happen which one may imagine did in the larger picture definitely helped in the process of forging of the national consciousness. From 1763 to 1856 there were more than forty major rebellions apart from hundreds of minor ones. The rebellions by the tribals were particularly poignant because the tribals when faced with a total uprooting of their thousands of years of secluded lifestyles in tune with nature deep inside forests, did not realise that their enemy was much more powerful than them and just threw themselves upon the enemies. There are legends like that of the *Kol* rebellion of Chota Nagpur and of Birsa Munda who gathered a force of 6000 *Munda* tribes with swords and axes and took on the British only to be mercilessly exterminated and destroyed.

After the revolt of 1857 had failed, there arose almost immediately a series of peasant revolts all over the country which went on till the early years of the 1880s and until the Congress was formed and could take over the representation of their demands. Almost all these movements were violent.

These movements were different in nature to earlier revolts. The princes, chiefs and talukdars etc of the past were gone, crushed or co-opted by the British. So the peasants were now directly fighting for their own demands, which were almost all the debilitating economic issues that they were facing and their target was always the new foreign planters, and Indian zamindars and moneylenders. So the movements were targeted towards achieving specific and limited objectives and for the solution of particular grievances. So the movements were in no way in the nature of a national movement against colonialism. Here it may be mentioned this view is mainly based on the Marxist or the Subaltern approach and other approaches do not fully agree.

It is not surprising that there were so many violent movements in the peasantry. The impoverishment and desperation of the farmers had continuously grown under British taxation policies and by the second half of the nineteenth century the situation had turned very bad. While there were seven famines in the first half of the nineteenth century with an approximate 15 lakh deaths, in the second half of the century there were twenty four famines with an estimated total of 285 lakh deaths.

During the second half of the nineteenth century there was the rise seen of an Indian industrial bourgeoisie notwithstanding the step motherly treatment they received at the hands of the British Government and the banks, which were all owned by the British. In 1853 the first successful cotton mill was started in Bombay. By 1880 there were 156 mills employing 44000 workers which rose to 193 mills by 1900 and employed 161000 workers. The Indian financed and owned industry had began to resent the discrimination vis-à-vis British owned industry by the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Also there had emerged a class of western educated Indians as has been pointed out earlier who were doctors, lawyers, academics and civil servants. Even this class of people had begun to develop resentments towards the British for what they saw as unequal opportunities for appointments and promotions in the services.

The continuous nation wide descent into misery of agrarian India as is discussed above was the most powerful element though of the nationwide rise of resentment against the British. Hence by the last quarter of the nineteenth century conditions were ripe for the beginnings of the Indian National Movement.

EXERCISE

1. Discuss the economic and societal impact of the early phase of British Colonial Rule.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *India's Struggle for Freedom*, Bipan Chandra (& others), Penguin, New Delhi, 1989
2. *India Today*, R. Palme Dutt, Manisha, Calcutta, 1970
3. *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, A. R. Desai, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1966

THE REVOLT OF 1857

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The socio-religious and socio-economic circumstances in which and the social bases among whom the revolt of 1857 broke out
- The consequences of the revolt

It is important to study the revolt of 1857 because it was in many ways the first major organised nationwide political rejection of the British rule. It was thus in many ways helpful in creating the spirit for the national movement that was to follow later.

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 began as a mutiny of sepoys of the British East India Company's army on 10 May 1857 in Meerut, UP and soon erupted into other mutinies and civilian rebellions nationwide but mainly in the northern and central India, with the major battles being fought in the towns of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and the Delhi region. The rebellion almost succeeded and alarmed and scared the British so much that they decided to end the rule of the East India Company and introduce direct rule from London. The revolt is also referred to variously as the Uprising of 1857, the Sepoy Rebellion or the Sepoy Mutiny, India's First War of Independence, the Great Rebellion, the Indian Mutiny but most usually as the Revolt of 1857. Regions other than in northern and central India, the Bengal province, the Bombay Presidency, and the Madras Presidency had remained largely calm. In Punjab, the Sikh princes backed the Company by providing both soldiers and support. The large princely states, Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, and Kashmir, as well as the states of Rajputana did not join the rebellion. In some regions, such as Oudh, the rebellion became not just a revolt of soldiers but a general rebellion by the civil population as well. Although not intending to do so at first, but later, many leaders such as the Rani of Jhansi, who became famous and laid down their lives in most cases, joined the revolt which took on a general character of a nationalist movement in India. In his book, 'Discovery of India', the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru called the 1857 war as the 'Feudal Revolt of 1857' and wrote, "It was much more than a military mutiny and rapidly spread and assumed the character of a popular rebellion and a war of Indian Independence."

The rebellion led to the dissolution of the East India Company in 1858, and forced the British to reorganize the army and the administrative system in India. India was thereafter directly governed by the Crown from London.

The British East India Company had at first only ruled over their factory areas established for trading purposes but its victory in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 in Bengal marked the beginning of its nationwide dominance in India. The control was consolidated in 1764 with the Battle of Buxar (in Bihar), when the defeated Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, granted control of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa to the Company. The Company also soon expanded its territories around its bases in Bombay and Madras and in this the Anglo-Mysore Wars (1766–1799) and the Anglo-Maratha Wars (1772–1818) were significant as it led to control of most of south India.

Then as the 19th century began, Governor-General Wellesley began what became two decades of accelerated expansion achieved either by alliances between the Company and local rulers or by direct military annexation. The alliances were used to create the many Princely States (or Native States). Punjab, North-West Frontier Province, and Kashmir were annexed after the Anglo-Sikh Wars in 1849. however, Kashmir was immediately sold under the Treaty of Amritsar (1850) to the Dogra Dynasty of Jammu and thereby became a princely state. In 1854, Berar was annexed, and the state of Oudh was added two years later. For practical purposes, the Company was the government of India.

Professor Bipan Chandra has called the revolt of 1857 the first major challenge to the British rule and has described its beginning in dramatic terms:

'It was the morning of 11 may 1857. The city of Delhi had not yet woken up when a band of *sepoys* from Meerut, who had defied and killed the European officers the previous day, crossed the Jamuna, set the toll bridge on fire and marched to the Red Fort. They entered the Red Fort through the Raj Ghat gate, followed by an excited crowd, to appeal to Bahadur Shah II, the Moghul Emperor – a pensioner of the British East India Company, who possessed nothing but the name of the mighty *Mughals* – to become their leader, thus, give legitimacy to their cause. Bahadur Shah vacillated as he neither sure of the intentions of the *sepoys* nor of his own ability to play an effective role. He was however persuaded, if not coerced, to give in and was proclaimed the *Shahenshah-e-Hindustan*. The *sepoys*, then, set out to capture and control the imperial city of Delhi. Simon Fraser, the Political Agent and several other Englishmen were killed; the public offices were either occupied or destroyed. The Revolt of 1857, an unsuccessful but heroic effort to eliminate foreign rule, had begun. The capture of Delhi and the proclamation of Bahadur Shah as the Emperor of Hindustan gave a positive political meaning to the Revolt and provided a rallying point for the rebels by recalling the past glory of the imperial city....Almost half the Company's strength of 2,32,224 opted out of their loyalty to their regimental colours and overcame the ideology of the army, meticulously constructed over a period of time through training and discipline'. (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 31)

The *sepoys* in the company's forces were a combination of Muslim and Hindu soldiers and at the time of the rebellion of 1857, there were over 200,000 Indians in the army compared to about 40,000 British. The forces were divided into three presidency armies: the Bombay; the Madras; and the Bengal. The Bengal Army was composed of higher castes, such as "Rajputs and Brahmins", mostly from the Avadh (or Oudh as the British called it) and regions in Bihar. The enlistment of lower castes in 1855 was restricted and unknown. But the Madras Army and Bombay Army were drawn from all castes and did not have a bias for upper-caste men. The domination of higher castes in the Bengal Army has been seen as a significant factor in why the mutiny unfolded. It is interesting as to why in Bengal Army the preference for upper caste men from Oudh and Bihar areas came to be. In 1772, when Warren Hastings was appointed the first Governor-General of the Company's Indian territories, he carried out a rapid expansion of the Company's army. But the soldiers, or *sepoys*, from Bengal had fought against the Company in the Battle of Plassey and so became suspect in the eyes of the British and it was decided it would not be safe to have recruits from Bengal. Hastings therefore moved towards the west from the high-caste rural Rajputs and Brahmins of Oudh and Bihar, a practice that continued for the next 75 years.

The British were not totally unmindful of the religious and caste sensitivities of the recruits. In fact respect was shown for religious rituals and the soldiers dined in separate areas and could live according to their rules of their caste or religion. Also overseas service involving

crossing the seas was not asked for. But gradually there emerged a conflict between what was demanded and the living conditions offered and what the sepoys could accept. As Professor Bipan Chandra explains: 'It is certainly true that the conditions of service in the Company's army and cantonments increasingly came into conflict with the religious beliefs and prejudices of the sepoys, who were predominantly drawn from the upper caste Hindus of the North Western Provinces and Oudh. Initially, the administration sought to accommodate the sepoy's demands: facilities were provided to them to live according to the dictates of their caste and religion. But, with the extension of the Army's operation not only to various parts of India, but also to countries outside, it was not possible to do so any more. Moreover, caste distinctions and segregation within a regiment were not conducive to the cohesiveness of a fighting unit. To begin with, the administration thought of an easy way out: discourage the recruitment of Brahmins; this apparently did not succeed and, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the upper castes predominated in the Bengal Army, for instance.....The unhappiness of the sepoys first surfaced in 1824 when the 47th Regiment at Barrackpur was ordered to go to Burma. To the religious Hindu, crossing the sea meant loss of caste. The sepoys, therefore, refused to comply. The regiment was disbanded and those who led the opposition were hanged. The religious sensibilities of the sepoys who participated in the Afghan War were more seriously affected. During the arduous and disastrous campaigns, the fleeing sepoys were forced to eat and drink whatever came their way. When they returned to India, those at home correctly sensed that they could not have observed caste stipulations and therefore, were hesitant to welcome them back into the *biradari* (caste fraternity). Sitaram who had gone to Afghanistan found himself an outcaste not only in his village, but even in his own barracks. The prestige of being in the pay of the Company was not enough to hold his position in society; religion and caste proved to be more powerful'. (Source: *ibid.* pp. 33-34)

Also there were rumours that the government had secret designs to convert Hindu and Muslim sepoys to Christianity which got credence from the fact that missionaries were allowed to address and preach inside cantonments and they openly criticised the religions of the sepoys like Hinduism and Islam. In the 1830s, Christian evangelists such as William Carey and William Wilberforce had successfully campaigned for the passage of social reform legislation such as the abolition of Sati and allowing the remarriage of Hindu widows this must have added to the suspicions. There were rumours that the company administration had mixed bone dust with wheat flour or atta and that was being fed to vegetarian sepoys. The introduction of Enfield rifles caused the ultimate provocation. The cartridges of the new rifle had to be bitten off before loading and the grease was reportedly made of beef and pig fat. The army administration had done nothing to deny and ally such rumours.

Not just religious sensitivity violations, but there was also discontent with service terms. Changes in the terms may have created resentment. The soldiers were not only expected to serve in less familiar regions (such as in Burma in the Anglo-Burmese Wars in 1856), but also were not paid any extra "foreign service" remuneration any more that had previously been paid. Another financial grievance stemmed from the General Service Act, which denied retired sepoys a pension. At first it was thought this would only apply to new recruits, but it was suspected that it would also apply to those already in service. In addition, the Bengal army was paid less than the Madras and Bombay armies, which compounded the fears over pensions. A major cause of resentment that arose ten months prior to the outbreak of the revolt was the General Service Enlistment Act of 25 July 1856. As noted above, men of the Bengal Army had been exempted from overseas service. Specifically they were enlisted only for service in territories to which they could march. This was seen by the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie as an anomaly, since all sepoys of the Madras and Bombay Armies (plus six "General Service" battalions of the Bengal

Army) had accepted an obligation to serve overseas if required. As a result the burden of providing contingents for active service in Burma (readily accessible only by sea) and China had fallen disproportionately on the two smaller Presidency Armies. The Act required only new recruits to the Bengal Army to accept a commitment for general (that is overseas) service. However serving high caste sepoys were fearful that it would be eventually extended to them, as well as preventing sons following fathers into an Army with a strong tradition of family service. There were also grievances over the issue of promotions, based on seniority (length of service). This, as well as the increasing number of European officers in the battalions,[15] made promotion a slow progress and many Indian officers did not reach commissioned rank until they were too old to be effective.

Also the new land revenue systems introduced in Oudh created discontent. Almost every family in Oudh had a son in the army of the company and the new system therefore was of direct concern to them as it affected their families back home. There were 14000 petitions received from the sepoys about the hardships of the revenue system that had been introduced. In fact after the rebels reached Delhi the proclamation that they made from the Red Fort clearly reflected the angst. As Professor Bipan Chandra has commented: 'The mutiny in itself, therefore, was a revolt against the British and, thus, a political act..What imparted this character to the mutiny was the sepoy's identity of interest with the general population'. (Source: *ibid.* Pp. 35)

The revolt of the sepoys at least in Oudh resulted in popular uprising from the civilian population as well. The civilian rebellion was more multifarious in origin. Three sections of civilian society particularly enthusiastically joined the: the feudal nobility, rural landlords called taluqdars, and the peasants all of whom had been economically affected by the new systems of land revenue and courts that the British were introducing to maximise their collection of tax.

The kings and royals, many of whom had lost titles and domains under the Doctrine of Lapse, which refused to recognise the adopted children of princes as legal heirs, were angered that the Company had imposed an alien system and interfered with a traditional system of inheritance. Rebel leaders such as Nana Sahib and the Rani of Jhansi joined the rebellion for these reasons at least partly. Rani of Jhansi was even prepared to accept East India Company supremacy if her adopted son was recognized as her late husband's heir and she had promised to the British that she would in return keep Jhansi "safe". But the British did not agree and ultimately therefore she was forced to join the rebels. In other areas of central India, such as Indore and Saugar, where such loss of privilege had not occurred, the princes remained loyal to the Company even in areas where the sepoys had rebelled. Royals, feudal landholders, and royal armies found themselves unemployed and humiliated. For instance the jewels of the royal family of Nagpur were publicly auctioned in Calcutta. Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General of India, had asked the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar and his successors to leave the Red Fort, the palace in Delhi. Later, Lord Canning, the next Governor-General of India, announced in 1856 that Bahadur Shah's successors would not even be allowed to use the title of 'king'.

The second group, the *taluqdars*, had lost half their landed estates to peasant farmers as a result of the land reforms that came in the wake of annexation of Oudh. As the rebellion gained ground, the taluqdars quickly reoccupied the lands they had lost, but strangely, in part due to the culture that used to prevail and the social prestige, power and influence that they enjoyed and feudal loyalty, they did not experience significant opposition from the peasant farmers, many of whom in fact joined the rebellion, which surprised the British very much.

The very heavy imposition of land-revenue taxes had resulted in many farmers either losing their land or going into great debt with money lenders which provided a good reason to rebel and liberate themselves from the vicious cycle of exploitation in which they were trapped.

That is also why the money lenders, in addition to the East India Company, were targeted and many were killed or looted. Additionally in some areas farmers had been forced to switch from subsistence farming to commercial crops such as indigo, jute, coffee and tea. This resulted in hardship to the farmers and increases in food prices.

As mentioned above the final spark as it were was provided by the reaction of Company officers to the controversy over the ammunition for new Pattern 1853 Enfield Rifle. To load the new rifle, the sepoys had to bite the cartridge open. It was believed that the paper cartridges that were standard issue with the rifle were greased with lard (pork fat) which was regarded as unclean by Muslims, or tallow (beef fat), regarded as anathema to Hindus. East India Company officers first became aware of the impending trouble over the cartridges in January, when they received reports of an altercation between a high-caste sepoy and a low-caste labourer at Dum Dum. The labourer had taunted the sepoy that by biting the cartridge, he had himself lost caste, although at this time the Dum-Dum Arsenal had not actually started to produce the new round, nor had a single practice shot been fired. On January 27, Colonel Richard Birch, the Military Secretary, ordered that all cartridges issued from depots were to be free from grease, and that sepoys could grease them themselves using whatever mixture "they may prefer". This however, merely caused many sepoys to be convinced that the rumours were true and that their fears were justified. On February 26, 1857 the 19th Bengal Native Infantry (BNI) regiment came to know about new cartridges which allegedly were wrapped in paper greased with cow and pig fat, which had to be bitten off by mouth. The cow being sacred to Hindus, and pig haram to Muslims, soldiers refused to use them. Their Colonel confronted them angrily with artillery and cavalry on the parade ground, but then accepted their demand to withdraw the artillery, and cancel the next morning's parade. On March 29, 1857 at the Barrackpore (now Barrackpur) parade ground, near Calcutta (now Kolkata), 29-year-old Mangal Pandey of the 34th BNI, angered by the recent actions by the East India Company, declared that he would rebel against his commanders. When his adjutant Lt. Baugh came out to investigate the unrest, Pandey opened fire but hit his horse instead. General John Hearsey came out to see him on the parade ground, and claimed later that Mangal Pandey was in some kind of "religious frenzy". He ordered the Indian commander of the quarter guard Jemadar Ishwari Prasad to arrest Mangal Pandey, but the Jemadar refused. The quarter guard and other sepoys present, with the single exception of a soldier called Shaikh Paltu, drew back from restraining or arresting Mangal Pandey. Shaikh Paltu restrained Pandey from continuing his attack. After failing to incite his comrades into an open and active rebellion, Mangal Pandey tried to take his own life by placing his musket to his chest, and pulling the trigger with his toe. He only managed to wound himself, and was court-martialled on April 6. He was hanged on April 8. Jemadar Ishwari Prasad was sentenced to death and hanged on April 22. The regiment was disbanded and stripped of their uniforms because it was felt that they harboured ill-feelings towards their superiors, particularly after this incident. Shaikh Paltu was promoted to the rank of Jemadar in the Bengal Army. Sepoys in other regiments saw this a very harsh punishment. The show of disgrace while disbanding contributed to the fire for the rebellion, as disgruntled ex-sepoys returned home to Awadh with a desire to inflict revenge.

Then the revolt started and spread rapidly. During the month of April, there was unrest at Agra, Allahabad and Ambala. In Ambala in particular, which was a large military cantonment where several units had been collected for their annual musketry practice, it was clear to General Anson, Commander-in-Chief of the Bengal Army, that some sort of riot over the cartridges was imminent. Despite the objections of the civilian Governor-General's staff, he agreed to postpone the musketry practice, and allow a new drill by which the soldiers tore the cartridges with their fingers rather than their teeth. However, he issued no general orders making this standard

practice throughout the Bengal. Although there was no open revolt at Ambala, there was widespread arson and some barrack buildings (especially those belonging to soldiers who had used the Enfield cartridges) and European officers' bungalows were set on fire.

There was also unrest in the city of Meerut itself, with angry protests in the bazaar and some buildings being set on fire. The Indian troops, led by the 3rd Cavalry revolted and the British junior officers who attempted to quell the first outbreaks were killed. The general public in the bazaar attacked the off-duty soldiers there. Indian civilians (some of whom were officers' servants who tried to defend or conceal their employers) were also killed by the sepoys. The sepoys freed their imprisoned comrades from the jails, along with 800 other prisoners (debtors and criminals). Some sepoys (especially from the 11th Bengal Native Infantry) escorted trusted British officers and women and children to safety before joining the revolt. Some officers and their families escaped to Rampur, where they found refuge with the Nawab.

Bahadur Shah at first did not take the rebels seriously treating the sepoys as ordinary petitioners but others in the palace were quick to join the revolt. During the day, the revolt spread. European officials and dependents, Indian Christians and shop keepers within the city were killed, some by sepoys and others by crowds of rioters. The next day, Bahadur Shah held his first formal court for many years. It was attended by many excited or unruly sepoys. The King was alarmed by the turn events had taken, but eventually accepted the sepoys' allegiance and agreed to give his symbolic leadership countenance to the rebellion. On 16 May, up to 50 Europeans who had been held prisoner in the palace or had been discovered hiding in the city were said to have been killed by some of the King's servants under a peepul tree in a courtyard outside the palace.

Although rebellion became widespread, there was little unity among the rebels. While Bahadur Shah Zafar was restored to the imperial throne there was a faction that wanted the Maratha rulers to be enthroned also, and the Awadhis wanted to retain the powers that their Nawab used to have.

There were calls for jihad by Muslim leaders like Maulana Fazl-e-Haq Khairabadi including the millenarian Ahmedullah Shah, taken up by the Muslims, particularly Muslim artisans, which made the British suspect that the Muslims were the main force behind this event. In Awadh, Sunni Muslims did not want to see a return to Shiite rule, so they often refused to join what they perceived to be a Shia rebellion. However, some Muslims like the Aga Khan supported the British. The British rewarded him by formally recognizing his title. The Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah, resisted these fundamentalist tendencies as he wished to maintain communal amity and was in agreement with the common platform that Hindus and Muslims had made. In Thana Bhawan, the Sunnis declared Haji Imdadullah their Ameer. In May 1857 the Battle of Shamli took place between the forces of Haji Imdadullah and the British. The Sikhs and Pathans of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Province supported the British and helped in the recapture of Delhi.

In 1857, the Bengal Army had 86,000 men of which 12,000 were European, 16,000 Punjabi and 1,500 Gurkha soldiers/ In all the British in the three Indian armies had 311,000 native Indian troops, and 40,160 British which did not include 5,362 officers. Fifty-four of the Bengal Army's 75 regular Native Infantry Regiments rebelled in the revolt of 1857.

On April 1, 1858, the number of Indian soldiers in the Bengal army loyal to the Company was 80,053 which included a large number of soldiers hastily recruited in Punjab and North-West Frontier after the outbreak of the war. The Bombay army had three mutinies in its 29 regiments whilst the Madras army had no mutinies, though elements of one of its 52 regiments

refused to volunteer for service in Bengal. Most of southern India remained passive with only sporadic and haphazard outbreaks of violence. Most of the states did not take part in the war as many parts of the region were ruled by the Nizams of Hyderabad (who sided with the British) or the Mysore Maharajas who also refused to go against the British.

Eventually the British regrouped, brought in fresh recruitments and using better weaponry and being better disciplined managed to beat back the rebellion. When the British reached Delhi they arrested Bahadur Shah, and the next day British officer William Hodson shot his sons Mirza Mughal, Mirza Khizr Sultan, and grandson Mirza Abu Bakr under his own authority at the Khooni Darwaza (the bloody gate) near Delhi Gate. On hearing the news Zafar reacted with shocked silence while his wife Zeenat Mahal, it is said, was happy as she believed her son was now Zafar's heir. Shortly after the fall of Delhi, the victorious British troops organised a column which freed another besieged Company base, and then moved forward to Kanpur (Cawnpore), which had also been recaptured. This gave the Company forces a continuous line of communication from the east to west of India. Bahadur Shah Zafar was exiled in Rangoon. Bahadur Shah was tried for treason by a military commission assembled at Delhi, and exiled to Rangoon where he died in 1862, bringing the Mughal dynasty to an end. In 1877 Queen Victoria took the title of Empress of India on the advice of Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli.

The most important consequence of the revolt of 1857 was the end of the rule of the British East India Company. In August, by the Government of India Act 1858, the company was formally dissolved and its ruling powers over India were transferred to the British Crown. A new British government department, the India Office, was created to handle the governance of India, and its head, the Secretary of State for India, was entrusted with formulating Indian policy. The Governor-General of India was renamed or given a new title called Viceroy of India, and was made in charge of implementing the policies devised by the India Office in London. The British colonial administration embarked on a program of reform, trying to integrate Indian higher castes and rulers into the government and abolishing attempts at Westernization.

The old executive set up to control and run India set up by the British remained.

Another major consequence was the reorganisation of the army. The Bengal army dominated the Indian army before the mutiny in 1857 and a direct result of the revolt of 1857 was the reduction in the size of the Bengali contingent in the army. Of the 67,000 Hindus in the Bengal Army in 1842, 28,000 were identified as Rajputs and 25,000 as Brahmins, a category that included Bhumiwar Brahmins. The Brahmin presence in the Bengal Army was reduced in the late nineteenth century because the British believed they had inspired the start of the revolt and had led the mutineers in 1857. The British instead started recruiting more soldiers from the Punjab. The old Bengal Army almost completely vanished. These troops were replaced by new units recruited from castes hitherto not recruited by the British and from the so-called "Martial Races", such as the Sikhs and the Gurkhas who now became the main stay of the British armed might. Some of the old rules within the arm organisation, which estranged sepoys from their officers were rectified and the post-1857 units were mainly organised on the "irregular" system. Before the rebellion each Bengal Native Infantry regiment had 26 British officers, who held every position of authority down to the second-in-command of each company but in the new . In irregular units, there were only six or seven officers, who associated themselves far more closely with their soldiers and while more trust and responsibility was given to the Indian officers. The British increased the ratio of British to Indian soldiers within India. Sepoy artillery was abolished also, leaving all artillery (except some small detachments of mountain guns) in British hands. The post 1857 changes formed the basis of the military organisation until the early 20th century.

Generally as to why the revolt failed various reasons are suggested: (a) there was no united India politically, culturally, or on ethnic terms and there were many regions each a mini nation unto itself, (b) not even Indian soldiers were all united in revolt – the revolt was finally put down with Indian soldiers only drawn from the Madras Army, the Bombay Army and the Sikh regiments, (c) many of the local rulers fought amongst themselves rather than uniting against the British, (d) many rebel Sepoy regiments disbanded and went home rather than fight, (e) not all of the rebels accepted the headship of the last Moghul emperor even though it was mainly symbolic and Bahadur Shah Zafar had no real control over the mutineers, (f) the revolt was largely in north and central India while the south and west remained untouched and in fact the Rajput kingdoms of Rajasthan supported the British with men, arms and materials, (g) indeed it is suggested many of revolts occurred in areas not under British rule, and against native rulers, often for local reasons, (h) the revolt was fractured along religious, ethnic and regional lines.

One major long term benefit of the revolt in terms of the growth of Indian nationalism was the common cause that Hindus and Muslims made against the outsiders, the British. This was quite significant historically. Also even though all of India did not participate this was the first major pan-India movement. Also it was not just the soldiers or sepoys but a cross section of Indian society from farmers to feudal lords made common cause across class and caste barriers. The sepoys did not seek to revive small kingdoms in their regions, instead they repeatedly proclaimed a "country-wide rule" of the Moghuls and vowed to drive out the British from "India", as they knew it then. The declared objective of driving out "foreigners" from not only one's own area but from their conception of the entirety of "India", it is suggested signified a real nationalist sentiment;

EXERCISE

1. Discuss the various suggested underlying socio-economic resentments that inspired the revolt of 1857.
2. What were the major consequences of the 1857 mutiny?.

SUGGESTED READING

1. Irfan Habib, *Understanding 1857*, in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *Rethinking 1857*, Delhi, Orient Longman, 2008

NATIONALIST POLITICS AND EXPANSION OF THE SOCIAL BASE

Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The phases and different streams of the of the Nationalist movement
- The partition of Bengal
- The emergence of Economic Nationalism
- The Culture, Community and Identity aspects of the nationalist movement

The impact of colonialism gradually over time in the latter half of the 1800s caused a nationalist impact and leaders and groups began to emerge who started thinking in terms of an Indian nation self-ruled by the Indian people themselves, at least partly.

The Indian National Congress which historian R.P. Dutt describes as the 'premier organisation' and 'the leading organisation of the Indian National Movement' was started in 1885. There was some disagreement among historians as to the circumstances surrounding the birth of the Congress with an earlier generation of historians like R.P. Dutt believing that the British had actively encouraged the birth of the Congress almost as a secret conspiracy to create a vent for Indian angst and resentment and to elicit the views of Indians but the modern generation of Indian historians like Bipan Chandra researched the subject in the fifties and sixties after the independence of India and came to the conclusion that the Indians who were at the foundation of the Congress were not exactly innocent victims of a quite British plan of enlightened British officers but wise men who wished to play along with any British encouragement if there was any to ultimately achieve their own ends. As Bipan Chandra and others put it if the English liberals had hoped to use the Congress as a 'safety valve' then the Congress leaders hoped to use the opportunity provided to use them as 'lightning conductors' and ultimately 'it was the Congress leaders whose hopes were fulfilled'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *'India's Struggle for Independence'*, Penguin Books, 1989, New Delhi, p. 81)

R.P. Dutt introduces the birth of the Congress with the following chronological account:

'The origins of Indian Nationalism are commonly traced to the foundation of the National Congress in 1885. in fact, however, the precursors of the movement can be traced through the preceding half century. Reference has already been made to the reform movement which found expression in the Brahmo Samaj established in 1828. In 1843 was founded the British India Society in Bengal, which sought to "secure the welfare, extend the just rights and advance the interests of all classes of our fellow subjects". In 1851 this was merged into the British Indian Association, which in the following year "they cannot but feel that they have not profited by their connection with Great Britain to the extent which they had a right to expect", setting forth grievances with regard to the revenue system, the discouragement of manufacturers, education and the question of admission to the higher administrative services, and demanding a Legislative Council "possessing a popular character so as in some respects to represent the sentiments of the people." These earlier associations were still mainly linked up with the landowning interests; and

indeed the merger by which the British Indian Association was formed, included the Bengal Landholders Society. In 1875 the Indian Association, founded by Surendra Nath Banerjea, was the first organisation representative of the educated middle class in opposition to the domination of the big landowners. Branches, both of the more reactionary British Indian Association and of the more progressive Indian association, were founded in various parts of India. In 1883 the Indian Association of Calcutta called the first all-India National Conference, which was attended by representatives from Bengal, Madras, Bombay and the United provinces. The National Conference of 1883 was held under the presidency of Ananda Mohan Bose who later became President of the National Congress in 1898; in his opening address he declared the Conference to be the first stage to a National Parliament. Thus the conception of an Indian National Congress had already been formed and was maturing from the initiative and activity of the Indian representatives themselves when the Government intervened to take a hand. The Government did not found a movement which had no previous existence or basis. The Government stepped in to take charge of a movement which was in any case coming into existence and whose development it foresaw was inevitable.' (Source: R. Palme Dutt, 'India Today', 1947, pp. 310-311, Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India)

So by 28th of December, 1885 when the Congress met for the first time, there was a clear realisation in the intelligentsia nationwide that there were common objectives for which the people of India needed to struggle for. Even as colonial administrators and ideologues argued that India could never be a free and united nation because India was merely a conglomeration of different races and castes and creeds, Indian leaders like Surendranath Banerjea and Tilak kept countering by saying that India was a 'nation in the making'. The Congress leaders were convinced that objective historical forces were bringing the Indian people together and the main objective at that stage of the national struggle at that time was to promote national unity and nationalism. So that became the main objective of the Congress. To create national unity or what we seek to do by giving out calls nowadays for 'national integration' or 'unity in diversity' was the main theme of the exertion of the founding leaders. The aims and objectives of the Congress laid down by the first president W.C. Bonnerji was the 'fuller development and consolidation of' the sentiments of national unity. The *Indu Praksh*, a prominent Bombay newspaper wrote of the first congress session as marking the 'beginning of a new life.....it will greatly help in creating a national feeling and binding together distant people by common sympathies, and common ends'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, 'India's Struggle for Independence', Penguin Books, 1989, New Delhi, quoted in p.75)

To balance regional aspirations and promote unity, even at that early stage it was decided that the Congress session would be rotated among different parts of the country and the president would belong to a region other than where the session of the Congress was being held. To promote communal harmony and prevent any potential discord or cause for disunity a rule was passed that no resolution was to be passed which had an overwhelming majority of Hindu or Muslim delegates objecting to it.

The Congress ~~also~~ decided very early that to be a national organisation it must confine itself to causes which were common to people all over the country in their dealings with the British. Hence agitation on social reform issues, it was decided, had to be kept away from! Dadabhai Naoroji had maintained that they must meet 'as a political body to represent to our rulers our political aspirations'.

Political action of the early leaders consisted of organising popular participation, mobilisation and agitations and also of course not only making repeated representations and

appeals to the British governments and legislatures but also directly to the British people in whose good sense there was much faith in sections of the Indian leadership. Also Indians were not familiar with the democratic notion that politics and political opinion is not the sole preserve of the upper strata of society and it was important for the whole of the people to form a political opinion for it to carry democratic weight. Among the first and important objectives of the Congress was to organise the arousal of this consciousness and then train and consolidate the public opinion. It was felt by the leaders of the movement at the time that as a first step the educated classes should be politicised and united from all regions of the country and thereafter the process could be extended to other sections. W.C. Bonnerji had declared as the first Congress President that the one of the major congress objectives was the 'eradication, by direct friendly personal intercourse, of all possible race, creed, or provincial intimacy amongst all lovers of our country....and the promotion of personal intimacy and friendship amongst all the more earnest workers in our country's cause in (all) parts of the Empire'.

The Congress, even though conceived as a movement rather than as a party, was at first, not inclined towards mass demonstrations and protest marches etc. The principal tools of political action continued to be petitions, prayers and memorials. Later leaders who were not as moderate and hence came to be describes by historians as extremists were extremely critical of these methods but the fact remains that in a situation of relatively zero sense of political nationalism and unity, the moderate phase did play an important role. Some moderate leaders even saw the initial phase as such. When Gokhale had expressed disappointment with the two line reply that the government had sent to a carefully and laboriously prepared memorial by the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha, Justice Ranade had told him: 'You don't realise our place in the history of our country. These memorials are nominally addressed to Government, in reality they are addressed to the people, so that they may learn how to think in these matters. This work must be done for many years, without expecting any other result, because politics of this kind is altogether new in this land'. The preaching and adoption of the methods of political democracy being amongst the main aims from the beginning the Congress was organised like a parliament with issues being decided thorough debate and discussion and occasionally through the vote.

In the spread of the nationalist spirit the nationalist newspapers most of which predated the foundation of the congress played a very important role. They spread the word on the economic exploitation of India in an imperial economy powerfully and far and wide as most of them being in the vernacular or regional languages. For instance the *Kesari* from Poona wrote on 28th of January, 1896: "Surely India is treated as a vast pasture reserved solely for the Europeans to feed upon". The drain theory of Dadabhai Naoroji and others proved very valuable in rallying nationalist opinion. The moderates started a campaign of making Indians aware that a large part of India's capital and wealth was being drained out or exported to Britain unilaterally or without return in the form of interest on loans, earnings of British capital invested in India, and the salaries and pensions of the civil and military personnel serving in India. This explanation of the process of imperial colonial economic exploitation by the British caught the imagination of the common man to a certain extent. To a British response that notwithstanding the economic flows British rule had brought security of life and property to the mass of Indian people, Dadabhai Naoroji responded as follows:

'The romance is that there is security of life and property in India; the reality is that there is no such thing. There is security of life and property in one sense or way - i.e., the people are secure from any violence from each other or from Native despots....But from England's own grasp there is no security of property at all, and, as a consequence, no security of life. India's property is not secure. What is secure, and well secure, is that England is perfectly safe and secure, and does so with perfect security, to carry away from India, and to eat up in India, her

property at the present rate of 30000000 or 40000000 pounds a year. I therefore venture to submit that India does not enjoy security of her property and life. To millions in India life is simply "half-feeding" or starvation, or famines and disease.' (Source: Bipan Chandra, Amallesh Tripathi, Barun De, 'Freedom Struggle', National Book Trust, p.60 [quoted in])

The other major area of thrust for the moderates was demanding administrative measures from the British government of the day. They relentlessly attacked the British government in their writings, petitions and appeals for the corruption, inefficiency and oppression of the officer class. Their most important demand was that the higher levels of the civil services should be open to Indians. Economic, moral and political grounds were put forward for this demand. The economic demand was that since higher salaries were paid to British officers and the money ultimately flowed out of the country, not appointing Indians to the highest levels was a huge drain on Indian finances. Politically it was argued the European civil servants ignored the needs of Indians and favoured the needs of European capitalists. Morally the Indian nationalists argued not appointing Indians to the highest levels of the civil service meant giving out the message that Indians are permanently inferior to Europeans. The aberrations and tyrannical acts of the officers of the civil service were constantly brought to light by the nationalist newspapers. Ultimately the moderates decided to raise the demand for separation of the executive and the judiciary on the plea that that would afford some protection to the people against the arbitrary acts of the police and bureaucracy by keeping open a route for seeking remedy before the law courts. The Indian nationalists brought to light the bias of the judicial process every time an Indian was involved in a criminal dispute with an European and protested the high cost of seeking legal remedy. Another issue raised by the early nationalists or moderates was the right to bear arms, which the nationalists had argued was a natural right of all people.

The moderates also agitated for the increase in the scope and quantum of welfare services of the British Indian government. One major area of welfare was education of the masses where the nationalist wanted a big increase. Another area was extensive medical and health facilities. It is indeed ironical that even fifty years after the independence of India these continue to be the main areas of concern in modern India.

The moderates also demanded that measures be undertaken to develop Indian industries and agriculture and took up the cause of Indian workers who had migrated to distant British colonies like South Africa, Malaya, Fiji etc etc. The moderates forcefully took up the issue of workers in European owned plantations, who lived and worked in near slavery like conditions but interestingly never took up the cause of workers in Indian owned factories and mines who it could be argued were exploited no less. In this case the 'Indian leaders gave precedence to the interests of Indian capitalists'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.62)

Another cause that helped the early Indian nationalists or the moderates to further their political role was the defence of civil rights and in particular the right to free speech and the freedom of the press. When in 1878, The Vernacular Press act was passed it was opposed tooth and nail till it was repealed in 1880. Also in the 1890s the government tried to curb newspaper criticism under the garb of protecting official secrets which was opposed by the moderates.

In 1897 B.G. Tilak and several other editors were charged with spreading criminal disaffection against the British government in their nationalist newspapers. Tilak was sentenced to 18 months rigorous imprisonment. Two Poona leaders, the Nattu Brothers were deported for the same reason and without trial. In response to this action the nationalist newspapers and the leaders of the nationalist struggle launched a huge protest movement. Tilak who was already well known became popular all India and was given the title of *Lokmanya*.

The response of the government to the movement for press freedom was very firm and harsh. The government passed many laws to curb press freedom and increased the powers of the police as a result of which nationalist workers could now be dealt with in the same manner as goondas and other bad characters. A national wide struggle was organised by the moderates and this fight for basic civil freedoms now became an inseparable part of the movement.

Even though Indians at first never demanded freedom and probably never imagined that they would some day actually make such a demand, the moderates from the very beginning did nevertheless demand progressive self-government. The moderates demanded that there should be greater participation in the existing Viceroys Legislative Councils. Even though the council had been expanded in 1861 and the provision made for a few non-official Indian representatives, these were often rich landholders or merchants, who invariably toed the official government line. The moderates demanded a widening of the powers of the council and an increase in the powers of the members to discuss the budget and to question and criticise the day to day administration. They also demanded that membership on the council should be by election of the representatives of the people. In 1892 the moderates had some success when the government passed the new Indian Councils Act. The Act increased the number of non-official members some of whom were to be indirectly elected and would have the right to speak on the budget but not to vote on it. This token reform meant merely to take away the issue from the nationalists left them utterly disappointed. So they promptly went back and raised the slogan of 'no taxation without representation' and demanded that there be a non-official elected majority in the Councils and there be a non-official Indian control over the public purse. Interestingly, while these demands were very democratic other logical democratic demands like extending voting rights to all Indians and to women was not demanded at any stage. This tended to sustain the impression that politics was for the middle and upper classes. At the turn of the century, all these demands were advanced hugely and a full self-governing status like in Canada and Australia was asked for by the moderates. They wanted full legislative and fiscal control of India for the elected representatives of the people. So the whole system was sought to be changed. Dadabhai Naoroji became the first Indian to use the term *Swarajya* or self-rule in 1906 at the Calcutta Session of the Congress. Hence Bipan Chandra and others comment that: 'Thus, the basic difference of the early nationalists with the later nationalists did not lie in a different definition of the nationalist political goal.....The real difference lay in the method of struggle to achieve the agreed goals and the character of the social classes and groups on whom the struggle would be based. In other words, the difference was not in the goals but on how to realise them in practice.'

The moderates began to be called 'moderates' due to their methods of political action. The methods of agitation were always strictly within the four corners of the law and the aim was constitutional agitation with orderly political progress albeit at a slow pace. They sought to educate the mass of Indian people on political questions and raise the level of political consciousness. They also sought to get the Indian people to transcend regional and provincial identities and build a united nationalist political opinion.

One of their methods was speeches of a high political and intellectual calibre in political meetings where resolutions setting forth demands for the government were passed. Another method was the press whereby through the nationalist newspapers a daily attack of the Government was carried out. On a regular basis and relentlessly petitions and memorials were sent by them to the high Government officials and the British Parliament directly. These documents were prepared by the western educated professionals like lawyers and judges from amongst the leadership of the national movement with the full application of all their talents and training.

The moderates, or some sections of them, were convinced that the British public at large and the members of the British parliament were not aware of the real conditions in India and had some faith in the sense of fairness of the British people. So they believed the British people should be approached directly. So deputations of leading Indian leaders were sent to Britain and in 1889 a British Committee of the National Congress was founded and in 1890 this committee started a journal in Britain called *India*. Dadabhai Naoroji spent a major part of his life and income doing propaganda work in England and ultimately in 1892 got elected to the British Parliament to be able to voice Indian demands there.

The main drawback of the moderates was that they tried so little and succeeded so little in involving the vast mass of the people of India to participate in the freedom struggle. Some of them had a low opinion of the discretion and judgement of the common poor Indian. Gokhale for instance commented that India was beset with 'endless divisions and sub-divisions in the country, the bulk of the population ignorant and clinging with a tenacity to the old modes of thought and sentiment, which are averse to all changes and do not understand change'. (Source: *Ibid.* P.67) They wished to wait for the political consciousness of the nation to ripen and for a sense of national unity to be forged before they would launch a more daring struggle when perhaps the best way to create those conditions may have been to launch a struggle in the course of which all those desired political developments in the mass of the people would have happened on its own. The moderates were also very wary of the power of the British crown. Gokhale for instance had out it thus:

'You do not realise the enormous reserve of power behind the Government. If the Congress were to do anything such as you suggest, the Government would have no difficulty in throttling it in five minutes.' (Source: *Ibid.* P. 68 [quoted in])

It has been argued that the early nationalists or the moderates as they came to be dubbed achieved very little by way of practical success. Mostly the British government adopted a policy of ignoring them and treating them with contempt. In fact as and when necessary the government continued to be even more regressive and repressive rather than becoming more accommodative of civil liberties. Combined with the fact that a very narrow base of people of India were even aware of them and their activities, much less involved with them, and the attitude of beggary though prayers and petitions that they were seen to have, they lost respect very rapidly particularly when a more militant breed of nationalists appeared on the scene in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Unlike later on, when the sheer personal sacrifice of Gandhi who led the life of a *sanyasi* of sorts accompanied with huge personal sacrifice, the relatively elitist lifestyle of the leaders of the moderates failed to create any mass enthusiasm and upsurge of emotional following. This was no less a drawback than any other.

However from the historical point of view the moderates did end up playing a very important role that may not have been obvious to most of them at the time. Bipan Chandra, Amalek Tripathi and Barun Dey comments on their role in as follows:

'But historically viewed, the political record of the early nationalists is not all that bleak. On the contrary, it is quite bright if the immense difficulties of the task they had undertaken are kept in view. In fact, it was their very achievements in the wider sense that led to the more advanced stages of the national movement and made their own approach historically obsolete. Thus the early nationalists represented the most progressive force of the times. They made possible a decisive shift in Indian politics.'

They succeeded in creating a wide political awakening and in arousing among the middle and lower middle class Indians and the intelligentsia the feeling that they belonged to one common nation – the Indian nation. They made the people of India conscious of the bonds of common political, economic, and cultural interests and of the existence of a common enemy in imperialism and thus helped to weld them in a common nationality. They popularised among the people the ideas of democracy civil liberty. It was in the course of the building up of the National congress and other popular and nationalist associations that the Indians acquired a practical knowledge of democracy at a time when the rulers constantly told them that they were fit only for 'benevolent' or 'oriental' despotism. Moreover, a large number of nationalist political workers were trained in the art of modern politics, and the people familiarised with the concepts and ideas of modern politics.

Most of all they did pioneering work in mercilessly exposing the true character of British imperialism in India. They linked nearly every important economic question with the politically dependent status of the country. And, therefore, even though they were moderate in politics and political methods, they successfully brought to light the most important political and economic aspect of the Indian reality – that Indian being ruled by a foreign power for the purposes of economic exploitation. Any regime is politically secure only so long as the people have a basic faith in its benevolent character or they are at least willing to acquiesce in its continuation. This provides legitimacy to the regime; this is its moral foundation. The economic agitation of the early nationalists completely undermined this moral foundation of British rule.' (Source: *Ibid.* pp. 74-75)

They further comment: 'the period from 1858 to 1905 was the seed-time of Indian nationalism; and the early nationalists sowed the seeds well and deep.....Instead of basing their nationalism or appeals to shallow sentiments and passing emotions, or abstract rights of freedom and liberty, or on obscurantist appeals to the past, they rooted it in a hard-headed and penetrating analysis of the complex mechanisms of modern imperialism and the chief contradiction between the interests of the Indian people and the British rule.....The result was that they evolved a common political and economic programme which united rather than divided the different sections of the people.....Later on Indian people could gather round this programme and wage powerful struggles'. (Source: *Ibid.* pp. 75-76)

Here it may be remembered what were the principal economic impacts of the changes the colonial British introduced. The most important impact was

- (a) the transformation of the village economy,
 - (b) the introduction of private property in land,
 - (c) a new land revenue system,
 - (d) commercialisation of agriculture by the introduction of cash crops
 - (e) ruination of village handicrafts all of which caused rural indebtedness and poverty
- not to mention led to the transfer of land from cultivating to non-cultivating owners.

Naturally therefore peasant movements were so widespread. Also movements by tribals were witnessed. Women for the first time also started stepping out of the homes and participating.

At the turn of the century and in the decades immediately before and after, important changes took place in the character of the national movement. In brief the era of the moderates gradually gave way to the era of the extremists.

It was a combination of factors that resulted in hardening of views leading up to the beginning of an extremist approach. On the one hand was the total failure of the old guard moderates to achieve much in terms of concessions and rights won from the British and a very hostile attitude that they (the British) adopted towards Indian leaders and on the other hand was the coming forward of a much larger class of Indians, particularly young people, who were growing very impatient and disappointed with their lot. They were upset with both their economic lot and the total lack of advancement of political rights and freedoms under the Congress leadership of the moderates. For the first time there was a class of educated unemployed. Also the economic misery of the peasants and workers had continued to increase all throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and by the turn of the century it was worse than at any time before, with famines being a regular affair in the countryside and near slavery like conditions of workers in plantations and factories and mines, even in those owned by Indians. In such dire circumstances the role of religious revivalists also became important who reminded Hindus in particular of their glorious past of the Vedas and Upanishads and inspired them to bold action and the spirit of sacrifice of the sort they had not contemplated before.

Interestingly some moderate leaders had almost foreseen the arrival of extremism. D.E. Wacha for instance had written to Dadabhai Naoroji in a letter dated 12th of January, 1905 that: 'The very discontent and impatience it (the congress) has evoked against itself as slow and non-progressive among the rising generation are among its best results or fruits. It is its own evolution and progress...(the task is) to evolve the required revolution – whether it would be peaceful or violent. The character of the revolution will depend upon the wisdom or un-wisdom of the British Government and action of the British people.' (Source: Bipan Chandra, *Amales Trpathi*, Barun Dey, 'Freedom Struggle', National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1994, p.75 [quoted in])

The British government had grown increasingly vary of the motives of the Congress over the years and by the beginning of the twentieth century was definitely quite hostile to anything it proposed. So the moderates were clearly failing. Gokhale, almost the chief ideologue of the moderates, expressed their frustration when he complained in his last years that, "the bureaucracy was growing frankly selfish and openly hostile to National aspirations. It was not so in the past". (Source: *Official History of the Indian National Congress*, 1935, p. 151) There was a constant attempt to pass draconian legislations and firmly deal with the ever restless Congress leaders by arrests and deportations. There was even an attempt made to undermine the movement by separating muslims and encouraging them to see the Congress as a Hindu organisation. Ultimately this effort was to bear tremendous fruits for the British because first Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and later M.A. Jinnah broke away from the Congress effort and ultimately caused the partition of India at the time of independence.

However, the immediate cause or trigger of the rise of the extremists was the decision of the British to partition Bengal, which gave a huge boost to the Swadeshi Movement and made it a nationwide mainstream mass movement. This was a dramatic development which really changed

the course of the freedom struggle. Bipan Chandra and others comment on the rise of the movement and cite the evidence for it as follows:

'The Swadeshi Movement had its genesis in the anti-partition movement which was started to oppose the British decision to partition Bengal. There was no questioning the fact that Bengal with a population of 78 million (about a quarter of the population of British India) had indeed become administratively unwieldy. Equally there was no escaping the fact that the real motive for partitioning Bengal was political. Indian nationalism was gaining in strength and partition expected to weaken what was perceived as the nerve centre of Indian nationalism at the time. The attempt, in the words of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, (1899-1905) was to 'dethrone Calcutta' from its position as the 'centre from which the Congress Party is manipulated throughout Bengal, and indeed, the whole of India.....The centre of successful intrigue,' and 'divide the Bengali speaking population.' Risley, the Home Secretary to the Government of India, was more blunt. He said on 6 December 1904: 'Bengal united, is power, Bengal divided, will pull several different ways. That is what the Congress leaders feel; their apprehensions are perfectly correct and they form one of the great merits of the scheme...in this scheme....one of our main objects is to split up and thereby weaken a solid body of opponents to our rule.'

(Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *'India's Struggle for Independence'*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 124-125)

Lord Hardinge even admitted later that "the desire to aim a blow at the Bengalis overcame all other considerations" when the decision to partition Bengal was taken.

When faced with the huge public outrage and fury over the decision, the reaction of Lord Curzon was firm and despotic. He wrote to the Secretary of State saying: 'If we are weak enough to yield to their clamour now, we shall not be able to dismember or reduce Bengal again; and you will be cementing and solidifying a force already formidable, and certain to be a source of increasing trouble in the future'. (Source: *Ibid.*) The most sinister aspect of the move though was the attempt at communalising the situation and dividing Hindus and Muslims to prop up Muslim communalists as a counter to the Congress and the National Movement. Curzon was blunt in his wooing of Muslims. In a speech at Dacca he told Bengali Muslims that partition would enable them to have Dacca as the capital of a new Muslim majority province and which would 'invest the Mohammedans in Eastern Bengal with a unity which they have never enjoyed since the days of the old Mussulman Viceroys and Kings' and the Muslims would get a 'better deal' and would be freed of the 'pernicious influence of Calcutta'. (Source: *Ibid.* [quoted in])

The public outrage and spontaneous protest against it was unprecedented. In the first two months following the announcement 500 meetings were held in Eastern Bengal alone. Fifty thousand pamphlets authored by leaders like Surendranath Banerjea were distributed and the nationalist vernacular press launched a sustained attack in its daily publications. Vast protest meetings were held in the town halls particularly in Calcutta and petitions were sent to the secretary of state. Of the petitions sixty nine memoranda were sent from the Dacca division alone and some were signed by as many 70000 people, a huge number given the level of politicisation of those times. Leaders like Surendranath Banerjea, even though he was moderate toured the country asking people to boycott Manchester cloth and Liverpool salt. On September 1st, 1905 the government announced that partition would take effect from 16th of October. Immediately protest meetings were held all over Bengal the very next day. Many of these meetings drew crowds of ten to twelve thousand, a very large number for those days, which rattled the British administration. The success of the movement can be gauged from the fact that the value of British cloth sold in some of the mofussil districts fell by five to fifteen times between September

1904 and September 1905. The actual day of partition was declared a day of mourning in Bengal and people fasted and no fires were lit at the cooking hearth. In Calcutta a *hartal* was declared. People took out processions and band after band walked barefoot, bathed in the Ganges in the morning and then paraded the streets singing *Bande Mataram* which almost became like the anthem of the movement. People tied *rachis* on each other's hand as a symbol of the unity of the two halves of Bengal. Later in the day Anadamohan Bose and Surendranath Banerjea addressed two huge mass meetings, which drew crowds of 50000 to 70000 people. This was the biggest meeting ever held under the nationalist banner ever anywhere before. Within a few hours of the meeting Rs.50000 was raised for the movement. Up to this time, notwithstanding the strong Hindu cultural undercurrent in term symbolisms anyway that had come to the fore in the movement and the constant efforts to divide the people along Hindu-Muslim lines by the British, there was some level of unity which was to be destroyed later. For instance, while describing the success of the movement against the partition of Bengal, Abdul Rasul, the President of the Barisal Congress in April 1906 said: 'What we could not have accomplished in 50 or 100 years, the great disaster, the partition of Bengal, has done for us in six months. Its fruits have been the great national movement known as the Swadeshi Movement'. (Source: *ibid.*, p.127 [quoted in])

The leaders running the show were mostly the moderate Congress leaders only who were professionals and liberals from professions like law, journalism and academics. It is interesting to note that this was the time when moderate techniques had full sway. The people and their leaders were content to adopt methods like petitions, memoranda, speeches, public meetings and press campaigns. No violent or even mildly confrontationalist in a violent sense was contemplated at all. In fact this was possibly why even zamindars and rich merchants who had hitherto kept away from supporting the congress joined and offered support to the cause. Also of course for the first time perhaps women came out in the struggle as well. But the real moving force behind the movement for the first time were students who formed the bulwark of the anti-partition and Swadeshi campaigns.

The leaders had hoped that with their political action sufficient force of public opinion would be created in Indian and England to force the government to relent and reverse the partition of Bengal. Needless to say no such thing happened. This was to prove to be a major disappointment, which among other reasons, one may safely assume caused the eventual subconscious shift in public consciousness towards a more extremist approach.

Even though the Swadeshi Movement was started with a resolution in the Town Hall of Calcutta on 7th of August, 1905 in a meeting called to protest the partition decision, the anti-partition movement and the Swadeshi movement were the work of the entire national leadership and the whole of the national movement against British rule got energised as a consequence. Gokhale presiding over the Benaras Congress, referred to the partition as a 'cruel wrong' and "a complete illustration of the worst features of the present system of bureaucratic rule, its utter contempt for public opinion, its arrogant pretensions to superior wisdom, its reckless disregard of the most cherished feeling of the people...Its cool preference of service interests to those of the governed". (Source: Bipan Chandra, Amalendu Trpathi, Barun Dey, 'Freedom Struggle', National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1994, p.83 [quoted in])

The idea of Swadeshi had not been new though by this time. Gopal Rao Deshmukh, G.V. Joshi and M.G. Ranade of Maharashtra and Rajnarain Bose, Nabagopal Mitra and the Tagore Family of Bengal had been votaries of Swadeshi for long. As early as 1870 Bholanath Chandra had recommended boycott of British goods to bring pressure on the British public. Tilak had run

a constant boycott campaign. So he worked very hard in making the Swadeshi Movement a success in Poona and Bombay. Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai spread the message of boycott in Punjab and other parts of India and Syed Haider Raza led the movement in Delhi. Chidambaram Pillai led the movement in the Madras Presidency where B.C. Pal also carried out a fiery lecture tour. The boycott message also spread to Kangra, Jammu, Multan and Haridwar. The Swadeshi Movement in many ways created the stature or identities of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, B. C. Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai in the combined famous christening of 'Lal-Bal-Pal' that became so famous. It had been realised by the end of the first decade of the new century that Swadeshi and boycott should be complementary and one can't succeed without the other. This though did for the first time bring out in the open the differences in approach and beliefs of the Moderates and the Extremists. The moderates were not opposed to the idea of adopting 'Swadeshi' but they were against the idea of adopting boycott of English goods as a political weapon. They felt this would harm the movement because they still saw the English people and Parliament as reasonable quarters in whose sense of reason and fair play a successful appeal could be made. Also many of the moderates were not fighting for complete independence but for some sort of self-rule or self-governing system that they agreed to call 'Swarajya'.

Here lay a major difference between the moderates and the extremists and also the major reason why extremists progressively began to appeal more to the masses than the moderates. The moderates all through had taken a public position that was ultimately accepting of British rule in a sense and merely sought some form of partial self-government at best like in Australia or Canada. There is a belief among historians that this approach was basically strategic and was adopted merely because the moderates realised that they were in no position to take on the might of the British Empire. While that may have been true of some of the leaders if not all, it is nevertheless instructive to peruse some of the public declarations of the early nationalist or moderates which made it easy for the extremist later to attack them or their pro-western orientation and consequent unfitness for running the national movement. Ananda Mohan Bose for instance, the President of the 1998 Congress had declared in that meeting that "the educated classes are the friends and not the foes of England – her natural and necessary allies in the great work that lies before her". Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, later to be the chief of the moderate camp in the power struggle against the extremists had declared in 1890: "I have no fears but that British statesmen will ultimately respond to the Call". Surendranath Banerjea, another moderate stalwart, had proclaimed that the ideal of Congressmen was to "work with unwavering loyalty to the British connection – for the object was not the suppression of British rule in India, but the broadening of its basis, the liberalising of its spirit, the ennobling of its character and placing it on the unchangeable foundation of a nation's affections". (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, p. 322[quoted in])

Even as the moderate leaders took such positions the economic lot of the people particularly of farmers and workers continued to worsen. Even educated people began to find it difficult to be economically successful. And along with that emerged particularly in Bengal and Maharashtra a sort of cultural revivalism based on Hinduism that hadn't been seen before. Bankimchandra's hymn *Bandemataram* in Bengal helped revive the cult of the Mother Goddess and the culture of violent physical revolution to overthrow enemies that went along with it. In Maharashtra, Tilak played the most important role, successfully giving a nationalist edge to the movement based on Hindu culture. Also the institution of celebrating Ganesh Puja, which was started at about this time played a very important role in consolidating this process. The Ramakrishna Movement and Swami Vivekananda in particular with his rousing and blood stirring speeches roused the whole of India. He declared: 'If there is a sin in the world, it is

weakness; avoid all weakness, weakness is sin, weakness is death...And here is the test of truth....anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison, there is no life in it, it cannot be true'. Vivekananda was a genuine social reformer though who boldly declared that religion was not for empty bellies and asked first of all for India to be freed of the ancient sources of weaknesses emanating from the caste system and the practice of priest craft and of extreme poverty and deprivation. He asked "When, O Lord, shall our land be free from the eternal dwelling upon the past?". His speeches at the World Parliament of Religions created a huge impact and gave a sudden sense of immense pride and confidence in the intellectual and philosophical legacy of ancient Hind texts particularly the *Upanisads* that Swami referred to as the 'Vedanta'. He boldly declared that it had been the mission of India and Indian culture throughout history to pursue the highest spiritual and philosophical goals as opposed to the materialism of the west from which also emanated their need for colonial expansion. Later Swami Dayanand's work with the Arya Samaj put down the roots of the same message in the north.

A major benefit of this cultural revivalism was that Indians felt the need for full self-reliance in economic activity. Indians therefore started chemical factories and soap factories and even a steam ship company was started so that dependence on British companies could be avoided. The share capital of the Tata Steel Company was easily subscribed to by Indians and the company could start operations eventually.

B.G. Tilak was the most important leader of the extremists. Other important leaders were B.C. Pal and Arubindo Ghosh from Bengal. Lala Lajpat Rai also supported the extremists when the difference between the moderates and extremists came out in the open. The extremists asked for three important changes from that of the moderates: first, they wanted the people of India to arise and demand full and complete freedom or *Purna Swaraj* as opposed to some sort of self-governing system won by appealing to the benevolence and sense of fair play of the British parliament and people. They believed that full freedom should be snatched from the British by the Indian people rising together as one and in doing so no suffering or sacrifice should be too much for the Indian people. Therefore they were quite willing to boycott foreign goods in the adoption of swadeshi even if by doing that they hurt the interests of common businessman and worker of Britain as opposed to the British Indian Government and thereby create ill will. Secondly they totally repudiated the notion that Indian needed the 'benevolent guidance' and assistance of Britain and the British system of advanced education and technical and scientific capabilities for rapid development. They believed that because they were the sons and daughters of an ancient and possibly superior culture they were good enough to bring about all the development that the people of India needed. They therefore wanted complete independence and immediately. Thirdly, unlike the moderates who were ever wary of the power of the British Empire to quell any attempt by Indians to seek freedom at once by use of their superior military and administrative strengths, the extremists had a fanatical and almost mythological belief in the power of the Indian masses to prevail and win freedom through mass action.

Apart from the Swadeshi and the boycott of foreign goods to which the moderates had agreed with the greatest of reluctance and only for a temporary period, the extremists extended the tool of boycott to government schools and colleges, courts, titles and even essential government services. They also took to the organisation of massive strikes to make operation of the British government impossible. They declared that their aim was to 'make the administration under present conditions impossible by an organised refusal to do anything which shall help either the British Commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the

administration of it'. They took control of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal after 1905 and launched into a fierce campaign of boycott and resistance. Initially they were intending only to oppose by the power of peaceful resistance but some like Aurobindo Ghosh had kept open the option of resorting to violence if all else failed and the British resorted to ruthless suppression as he feared they would. Aurobindo Ghosh also chose to describe the Indian nation as a mother goddess, the first time this was done, and declared that participation in the struggle was worship. Later during the revolutionary terrorist phase taking purifying dips in the Ganges and praying in *Kali* temples before launching attacks became the norm for the terrorists. Initially though they imagined that perfectly peacefully when everybody from the *chowkidar* to the constable, the deputy and the munsif and the clerk to the sepoys and the soldiers of the armed forces all unitedly and together resigned from their functions, British rule would find it difficult to operate for even half a second.

The boycott of foreign goods was the technique of resistance of the extremists that met with the greatest success. Apart from boycott of foreign goods, even picketing of shops selling foreign goods became commonplace in even remote towns and villages. Women refused to wear bangles that were not Indian and washermen refused to wash foreign clothes and in some places even priests refused to accept offerings that contained foreign sugar.

Unlike at anytime before mass protests, processions and public meetings now became important tools to make the depth of Swadeshi nationalist sentiment obvious because for the first time masses really were participating. Corps of volunteers or *samitis* was another tool that was developed by the extremists with great effect. The Swadeshi Bandhab Samiti set up by Ashwani Kumar Dutt, a school teacher, in Barisal in eastern Bengal attracted great attention because it had 159 branches that covered the remotest corners of the district and Dutt was able to generate mass following that distinguished itself by the fact that while he, the leader, was Hindu, most of his followers were the Muslim peasantry of the region. The *samitis* took the message of Swadeshi to the villages through lectures and songs with the help of magic lanterns and gave physical and moral training to their members. They also did social work during famines and epidemics, organised schools, and trained people in Swadeshi crafts and ran arbitration courts so that people can solve their disputes without turning to the British legal system. By august 1906 the Barisal Samiti had reportedly settled 523 disputes through eighty-nine arbitration committees totally alarming the British administration. Within a few years though when the British cracked down on the extremists Ashwani Kumar Dutt was among the leaders from Bengal to be deported.

The Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals made popular by Tilak in Maharashtra became a powerful tool to spread the message and were also adopted in Bengal where *jatras* (village drama shows) were extensively used to transmit political ideas at the village level where people got exposed to modern political ideas (of representative democracy) for the first time. Tilak's role cannot be over emphasised. He devoted his entire life to the freedom movement. He was a graduate of the Bombay University and started many newspapers and journals. He used his talent for journalism to mould public opinion in favour of the political aims and objectives of the national struggle. Along with G.G. Agarkar he founded the English newspaper *Maratha* and another in Marathi called the *Kesari*. Significantly Tilak was the first one to advice peasants in

Maharashtra to not pay the exploitative and totally destructive land revenues when their crops failed owing to drought or famine or pestilence. When Viceroy Elgin imposed an excise duty on Indian mill-made cloth to aid British imports, he launched a campaign for the boycott of English cloth. The British got very alarmed with Tilak and arrested him in 1897. He was charged with spreading hatred and disaffection against the Government which led to the killing of British Plague Officers, Rand and Ayerst. His defence was bold and unflinching and he roared like a lion in court, which was reported by the nationalist press on a day to day basis. He refused to apologise for having spread disaffection and accepted the 18 months of rigorous imprisonment that was laid down for him with pride. His bold example and sacrifice had a huge impact on the nation and the whole nation was filled with a surge of nationalist emotion.

Marxist historians like R.P. Dutt have taken a less than lionising view of the stance and activities of the extremists. He comments as follows on the rise and growth of the extremists: "The starting point of the opposition leadership, as against the Old Guard, was undoubtedly the desire to make a break with compromising policies of conciliation with imperialism, and to enter on a path of decisive and uncompromising struggle against imperialism. To this extent they were a radical and potentially revolutionary force. But this desire was still a subjective desire on their part. There was no basis yet of the mass movement to make such a decisive struggle possible. Their appeal reached to the discontented lower middle class and to the hearts of the literate youth, especially to the poorer students and the new growing army of unemployed or poorly paid intellectuals, whose situation was becoming increasingly desperate in the opening years of the twentieth century, as it became manifest that there was no avenue or fulfilment for them under imperialist conditions, and who were little inclined to be patient with the slow and comfortable doctrines of gradual advance preached by the solidly established upper class leaders. Such elements can provide, in periods of social transition and the impending break-up of an old order, very considerable dynamic forces of unrest and potential revolutionary energy; but they are by the nature of their situation incapable of realising their aspirations, until they find their role in relationship to the mass movement, and can only seek satisfaction either in exalted verbal protest, or in anarchist individualist and ultimately politically ineffective forms of action.

Had the new leaders been equipped with a modern social and political outlook, they would have understood that their main task and the task of their supporters lay in the development of the organisation of the working class and of the mass of the peasantry on the basis of their social, economic and political struggle for liberation. But to have demanded such an understanding in the conditions of the first decade of the twentieth century in India would have been to demand an understanding in advance of the existing stage of social development.

Cut off from any scientific social and political theory, the new leaders sought to find the secret of the compromising in-effectiveness of the Moderate leaders in their "denationalised" "Westernising" tendencies, and concentrated their attack against these tendencies. Thus they fixed their attack against precisely those tendencies in respect of which the older Moderate leaders were progressive. Against these, they sought to build the national movement on the basis of the still massive forces of social conservatism in India, on the basis of Orthodox Hinduism and the affirmation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu or "Aryan" civilisation to modern "western" civilisation. They sought to build the national movement, the most advanced movement in India, on the basis of Orthodox Hinduism and the affirmation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu or "Aryan" civilisation to modern "Western" civilisation. They sought to build the national movement, the most advanced movement in India, on the basis of the most antiquated religion and religious superstitions.' (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India

Today', Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India, 1970, pp. 324-25) R.P. Dutt points out as evidence of this new alliance between radical nationalism and Orthodox Hinduism the support that Tilak offered for instance in 1890 to the fight against the Age of Consent Bill, which sought to raise the age of consummation of marriage of girls from ten years to twelve years. Older moderates stalwarts like Justice Ranade had fought long and for this Bill to be passed, which they had advocated as an essential social reform legislation to the British. Tilak later organised Cow Protection Societies and was of course the prime mover behind the cult of Ganapati that caught on hugely and aided this new form of extremist and militant nationalism that extremist leaders like him hoped to foster. In Bengal the cult of worshipping the Mother Goddess Kali that overnight became a rage was symptomatic of the same phenomenon. So R.P. Dutt further comments:

'It is necessary to recognise the national patriotic purpose which underlay these religious forms. Beneath the protection of the religious cover widespread national agitation was conducted through annual festivals and mass gatherings, an organisation was developed with the formation of leagues under religious titles and gymnastic societies of the youth. Under conditions of severe imperialistic repression of all direct political agitation and organisation, before the national movement had reached any mass basis, the use of such forms was justifiable. It was not a question, however, only of the formal cover, or of the historical form of growth of a political movement. The insistence on orthodox religion as the heart of the national movement, and the proclamation of the supposed spiritual superiority of the ancient Hindu civilisation to modern "Western" civilisation (what modern psychologists would no doubt term a compensatory delusion), inevitably retarded and weakened the real advance of the national movement and of political consciousness, while the emphasis on Hinduism must bear a share of the responsibility for the alienation of wide sections of Muslim opinion from the national movement.....How this outlook arose we have seen. The Orthodox Nationalists saw the old upper-class Moderate leaders saturated with the "denationalised" outlook and methods, learning, social life and politics of the British bourgeoisie. Against this "denationalisation" or capitulation to British culture they sought to lead a revolt. But on what basis could they lead a revolt? . They were themselves, in fact, tied to the narrow range of the bourgeois outlook (socialism had not yet in practice made any contact with Indian political life at that time), and hence could not see with critical understanding the workings of capitalism alike on its positive side and its negative side. In consequence they could not see that the so-called "British" culture they were denouncing was in reality the culture of capitalism; that the national movement, in so far as it was led by the bourgeois, could not yet transcend that basis; and that the only final progressive opposition to that culture could come from the working class. They could not, on the basis of experience then in India, have any conception of the rising working class outlook and culture which alone can be the alternative and successor to bourgeois culture going beyond it, taking what is of value and leaving the rest. Therefore, when they came to look for a firm ground of opposition to the conqueror's culture, they could only find for a basis the pre-capitalist culture of India before the conquest.....Against the overwhelming flood of British bourgeois culture and ideology, which they saw completely conquering the Indian bourgeois and intelligentsia, they sought to hold forward the feeble shield of a reconstructed Hindu ideology which had no longer any natural basis for its existence in actual life conditions. All social and scientific development was condemned by the more extreme devotees of this gospel as the conquerors' culture: every form of antiquated tradition, even abuse, privilege and obscurantism, was treated with respect and veneration.....So it came about that these militant national leaders of the people, devoted and fearless as many of them were, who should have been leading the people forward along the path of emancipation and understanding, away from all the evil relics of the past, appeared instead in practice as the champions of social reaction and superstition, of caste division and privilege, as the allies of all the "black" forces, seeking to hold down the

antiquated pre-British social and ideological fetters upon the people in the name of a high-flown mystical "national" appeal....The Orthodox Nationalists believed that in this way they were building up a mass national movement of opposition to imperialism. Only so can be explained that a man of the intellectual calibre of Tilak should have lent himself to such agitations as his campaign in defence of child-marriage or his cow Protection Society....But this policy was, in fact, not only vicious in principle, but mistaken in tactics. It not only inevitably weakened the advance of the political consciousness and clarity of the movement (nearly all the best-known leaders of Extremism moved later in varying degree to co-operation with imperialism, or to speculative abstraction from politics, and found themselves out of sympathy with the subsequent advance of the movement), but also divided the advancing forces. The programme of social reaction alienated many who would have been ready to support a more militant national policy, but were too clear sighted to accept the reactionary and metaphysical rubbish which was being offered as a substitute for a left-wing programme'. (Source: *Ibid.* Pp. 326-28) He further comments that 'Orthodox Nationalists, while building on the religious basis for their argument, could derive no weapon or plan of action there from save the universal weapon of desperate, but impotent, petty-bourgeois elements divorced from any mass movement – individual terrorism. Even here the fruits of the very vague general religious incitation and exaltation, and formation of secret societies, were very meagre.....When by 1905 the situation was ripe for a new stage of struggle, the main weapon which was found was one which was remote from all the previous religious and metaphysical speculations, and bore an essentially modern and economic character – the weapon of the economic boycott. In the choice of this weapon, which was the only possible effective weapon at the time, was expressed the bourgeois character of the movement; and indeed support of this weapon was taken up by the Moderate leaders'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.329)

By 1908 the extremist phase in the national movement, for all its impact, had begun to fail. The British were quite alarmed by the violent revolutionary potential of the movement that was developing and decided to finish it off by a following two-pronged strategy. One, by cruelly and ruthlessly curbing the extremists and the other by accentuating and encouraging the difference between the moderates and the extremists. They decided to pretend to take measures, which will create the impression that the moderates were achieving success in their goals, so that the extremist's approach would get discredited and people would feel wary of following them. The repressive measures that were introduced were bans and controls on meetings, rallies and processions and the press. Students who participated in the Swadeshi movement were expelled from schools and colleges, debarred from applying for government service (the principal economic attraction in seeking an education it may be imagined) and also fined. School students were arrested merely for singing national songs. There were 550 political cases filed before the courts in Bengal alone. Also of course the police took to violently and brutally beating up participants like never before.

In 1907 and 1908 nine major leaders of the movement in Bengal including Ashwani Kumar Dutt and Krishna Kumar Mitra were deported. Tilak was given a six years imprisonment and in Punjab, Ajit Singh and Lajpat Rai were also deported. In Madras Chidambaram Pillai and in Andhra Harisarovattam Rao were arrested. B.C. Pal retired from active politics in view of this advancing age and in the face of the severe police repression. Aurobindo Ghosh had a spiritual transformation and decided that he wanted to spend the rest of his life like a Sanyasi in search of the higher truths of Upanishadic Hinduism. He went away to Pondichery and founded an ashram there.

Apart from this sudden exit of so many of the extremist voices the constant squabbling within the Congress with the moderates and their gradual separation leading to a split in 1907 had left the movement considerably weakened. The bitterness between the two sides, moderates and extremists, can be gauged from the following that H.A. Wadia, a leader close the moderate stalwart Sir Pherozshah Mehta wrote in an article after referring to the extremists as the 'worst enemies of our cause':

'The union of these men (the extremists) with the Congress is the union of a diseased limb to a healthy body, and the only remedy is surgical severance, if the Congress is to be saved from death by blood poisoning'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *'India's Struggle for Independence'*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989, p. 139)

This severance happened in the Surat Congress session in December of 1907. Before the session there had been a rumour that the moderates would try to scuttle the four Calcutta Resolutions of the earlier congress in Calcutta in 1906 in which the Moderates under Dadabhai Naoroji had somewhat compromised with the Extremists and agreed to many revolutionary demands. The resolutions had accepted for the first time the idea of a Swaraj, support for the boycott of foreign goods which the moderates were very uncomfortable about, support for Swadeshi or indigenous industries and a campaign of National Education. So Swaraj, Boycott, Swadeshi and National Education had become the four cardinal points of the Congress programme. Also apart from the rumour there had been mass meetings held in Surat over three days prior to the session in which much ridicule and venom had been heaped on the Moderates, which had deeply hurt their senior leaders. When the session started the Extremists wanted a guarantee on the four resolutions that they would be passed and to force the Moderates to do so they opposed the duly elected President for the year, Rash Behari Ghosh who was a Moderate. As soon as the session started because there were people on both sides who had come prepared for confrontation, there was a chaos and people were fighting each other by shouting at each other and throwing blows and chairs. Somebody in crowd threw a shoe at the dias, where Pherozshah Mehta and Surendranath Banerjee was sitting and the shoe hit Sir Pherozshah. As soon as this happened the police came and cleared the hall and the Congress Session was over. When the news spread of the breakdown of the congress there was gloom all over the country among nationalists but the British were triumphant. Lord Minto wrote to Lord Morley that the 'Congress collapse' at Surat was 'a great triumph for us'. Bipan Chandra and others comment on the opposing positions that the Extremists and the Moderates took as follows:

'Both sides had it wrong – from the nationalist point of view as well as their own factional point of view. The Moderates did not see that the colonial state was negotiating with them not because of their inherent political strength but because of the fear of the Extremists. The Extremists did not see that the Moderates were their natural outer defence line (in terms of civil liberties and so on) and that they did not possess the required strength to face the colonial state's juggernaut. Neither saw that in a vast country like India run by a powerful imperialist nation only a broad based united movement had any chance of success'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.139)

As has been mentioned above the British had decided particularly after the collapse of the Surat Congress in 1907 that their strategy from then on apart from a brutal suppression of the Extremists would also include granting some achievements to the Moderates to "rally" to enable them to capture the driving seat of the movement. So the British in 1909 under the so called Morley-Minto Reforms extended the system of indirectly elected representation under the amended Indian Councils Act of 1892 by permitting a minority of such indirectly elected representatives in the Central Legislative Council and a majority in the Provincial Councils. Both the councils were advisory bodies and had no real powers. The Moderates saw this move as a

success of theirs and later when in 1911 the revision of the Partition of Bengal was announced, the Moderates were convinced beyond all doubt that their was the right path and so the spokesman of the Congress lost no time in declaring that "every heart is beating in unison with reverence and devotion to the British throne, overflowing with revived confidence in and gratitude towards British statesmanship". (Source: R.P. Dutt, '*India Today*', Manisha Publishers, Calcutta, India, 1970, p. 331 [quoted in])

So R.P. Dutt sums up the successes and failures of the Extremists as follows:

'The revision of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 represented a partial victory of the boycott movement. The wave of struggle which had developed during the years 1906-1911, did not maintain its strength during the immediately succeeding years; but the permanent advance which had been achieved in the stature of the national movement was never lost. Despite all the limitations of the Extremist leaders of those pre-1914 years, they had achieved a great and lasting work; the Indian claim to freedom had for the first time during those years been brought to the forefront of world political questions; and the seed of the aim of complete national liberation, and of determined struggle to achieve it, had been implanted in the political movement, and was destined in the subsequent years to strike root in the masses of the people'. (Source: *Ibid.* pp. 331-32)

EXERCISE

1. What were the various phases of the nationalist movement? Discuss fully.

SUGGESTED READINGS

4. *India's Struggle for Freedom*, Bipan Chandra (& others), Penguin, New Delhi, 1989
5. *India Today*, R. Palme Dutt, Manisha, Calcutta, 1970
6. *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, A. R. Desai, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1966

GANDHI AND MASS MOBILISATION

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- Gandhi's idea of the Indian National Identity
- The techniques adopted by Gandhi; non-cooperation and civil disobedience
- The Khilafat movement and Gandhi's role

When Gandhiji emerged in the national movement after his South African experience in the post first world period with the non-cooperation movement. India by this time had seen through the peasant struggles of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries including the revolt of 1857. The social reform movements - the Brahmo Samaj, Dayanand Saraswati's Arya Samaj Movements etc passed into liberal phases subsequently with the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and leaders like Gokhale, Ranade, Dadabhai Naoroji, W.C. Banerjee etc. The whole movement was socially forward but politically backward. It was the militant nationalism of the famous Lal-Bal-Pal with their slogan of 'Swaraj is my birth right' to a revolutionary terrorism with bombs, pistols, individual killings as a method with individual martyrs like Surya Sen and Bhagat Singh which formed the background to Gandhi's emergence.

It was only after this that the age of Gandhi began and his continued dominance and leadership of the national movement as the pre-dominant leader of the Indian National Congress till the achievement of independence. Therefore it was a challenge for the Indian nationalist leadership to develop a national identity, a method of struggle and transform the movement into a mass movement of the Indian people.

Mohandas Karam Chand Gandhi is significant because he could understand and bring the Indian masses - men and women - urban and rural - into the national movement. It was a radical break from the earlier methods of struggle.

Before we start discussing Gandhi's views on nation, nationhood, or nationalism it is necessary to have a brief overview of the whole period of the freedom movement when Gandhi occupied the centre stage. It is true that Gandhi could evolve a program of struggle which could recognise the role of the masses and the mass actions which involved every section of the society and for the first time it was under his leadership that Indian national movement became a multi-class nationalist movement and it was under his leadership that masses came out to court arrest, jails and cold face police firing and created an undying hatred against the British rule and a thrust for swaraj or freedom. It should also be remembered that Gandhi provided a program of action for each sections of the society. For peasantry, non-payment of land tax, for students, boycott of educational institutions, for lawyers, desertion of the courts, for women - picketing the liquor shops, foreign cloth shops and he asked the people as a whole to violate 'lawless laws' and it is

under his call that millions of Indians joined the demonstrations and marched into jails using methods of satyagraha, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience. His use of hunger strikes, mass demonstrations, deliberate courting of jails were the principal weapons which he added to the nationalist struggle. The period between 1919 to independence is marked by three important struggles - Non-cooperation movement of 1919, Civil Disobedience movement of 1930, with its call of complete independence and the famous Quit Indian Movement of 1942.

The Non-cooperation movement was a significant movement because it unveiled in a real sense and on a massive scale the satyagraha technique of Gandhi for the first time. The movement, which lasted from 1920 to 1922 organised resistance to British occupation of India through non-violent means like refusing to buy British goods, adopting local handicrafts and *khadi*, picketing of liquor shops etc. The Gandhian ideals of ahimsa or non-violence were put into practice and demonstrated to hundreds of thousands of people and the British rulers for the first time on such a large scale. It is significant to remember the relentless colonial oppression, exemplified by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, economic hardships of the common man, popular resentment with the British over Indian soldiers dying in World War I while fighting as part of the British Army, in battles that otherwise had nothing to do with India all added to the enthusiasm for the movement. Earlier political leaders like Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Annie Besant, Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Bal Gangadhar Tilak for home rule were accompanied only by petitions and major public meetings and never caused disruption or obstruction of government services and perhaps that is why the British did not take them very seriously, at least partly. The success of the revolt was a total shock to the British authorities. However on February 4, 1922, in the Chauri Chaura, after violent clashes between the local police and the protestors in which three protestors were killed by police firing, the police station was set on fire by the mob who had been fired upon, killing 22 of the police officers present inside.

This was unacceptable to Gandhi's ideas of non-violence and he was disappointed that the revolt had lost its non-violent character. Gandhi immediately appealed for the violent resistances to end and even went on a fast lasting 3 weeks, and finally called off the mass civil disobedience movement.

The Civil Disobedience Movement was launched under Gandhi's leadership in 1930. The Simon Commission, constituted in November 1927 by the British Government to prepare and finalize a constitution for India and consisting of members of the British Parliament only, was boycotted by all sections of the Indian political groups at that time including Congress as it was an 'All-White Commission' consisting only of the British. There was massive opposition to the Simon Commission in Bengal and a hartal or general strike was observed on 3 February 1928 in various parts of the province. Massive demonstrations were held in Calcutta on 19 February 1928, the day of Simon's arrival in the city. On 1 March 1928, meetings were held simultaneously in all thirty-two wards of Calcutta City urging people to renew the movement for boycott of British goods.

Following the rejection of the recommendations of the Simon Commission by the Indians, an All-Party Conference was held at Bombay in May 1928 presided by M A Ansari and the Conference appointed a drafting committee under Motilal Nehru to draw up a constitution for India. The Nehru Report was accepted by all sections of Indian society except by a section of Indian Muslims. In December 1928, the Indian National Congress pressed the British Government to accept the Nehru Report in its entirety. The Calcutta Session of the Indian Congress (December 1928) virtually gave an ultimatum to the British Government, that if

dominion status were not conceded by December 1929, a countrywide Civil Disobedience Movement would be launched. The British Government, however, declared in May 1929 that India would get dominion status within the Empire very soon.

The most important action in the movement was the SALT SATYAGRAHA in which Gandhiji undertook his most famous campaign, a march of about 400 kilometres [240 miles] from his commune in Ahmedabad to Dandi, on the coast of Gujarat between 12 March and 6 April 1930. The march is usually known as the Dandi March. At Dandi, in protest against British taxes on salt, he and thousands of followers broke the law by making their own salt from seawater. It took 24 days to complete this march and along the way Gandhi addressed people and gave many speeches.

In April 1930 there were violent police-crowd clashes in Calcutta. 100,000 people were imprisoned. In Peshawar unarmed demonstrators were fired upon in the Qissa Khwani bazaar massacre. This catapulted the then newly formed Khudai Khidmatgar movement (founded by Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Frontier Gandhi) onto the national scene. When Gandhi was in jail, the first Round Table Conference was held in London in November 1930, without representation from the Indian National Congress. The ban upon the Congress was removed because of economic hardships caused by the long satyagraha campaign and Gandhi, along with other members of the Congress Working Committee, was released from prison in January 1931 so that they may be able to attend the conference.

In March 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was signed, and the British agreed to set all political prisoners free. At this time the death sentence to revolutionary extremist Bhagat Singh and his two comrades was not taken back by the British as demanded which further fired up the people and the masses. Gandhi agreed to discontinue the civil disobedience movement and participate as the sole representative of the Congress in the second Round Table Conference, which was held in London in September 1931. However, the conference ended in failure in December 1931 and Gandhi returned to India. The civil disobedience movement was resumed in January 1932 and later the Quit India Movement of 1942 became the biggest civil disobedience action on the satyagraha strategy of Gandhi.

It is in the background of the mass movements that Gandhi and his role must be understood.

Therefore the person Gandhi, his technique of struggle, his concept of national identity was radically different as Professor Bhikhu Parekh has commented: 'He more or less completely bypassed the dominant nationalist vocabulary and showed that it was possible to articulate and defend the case for independence in a very different language. He showed that not every movement for independence is national, not every national struggle is nationalist and that not every nationalist movement need articulate itself in the language of European rather than home-grown theories of nationalism'. (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 3)

Many of the other leaders who came before Gandhi were western trained lawyers or intellectuals and saw many positives to the Western British way of life and were demanding from the British the same liberal system and parliamentary democracy on the basis of self-determination that the British had in their own homeland and also hoped to stop the economic exploitation of colonial rule. But Gandhi focussed on the way of life of the Indian village and its thousands of years old substantially self-contained and self-sufficient system to argue for a

different kind of national life where that way of life would be valued and protected and it's strengths fully taken advantage of in the interest of the nation. He also argued the basic purpose of life in the Indian national understanding was spiritual growth (or attaining *moksha*) and one of the best facilitators of this moral cultivation was the simple and sustainable way of life of the Indian village.

Prof. Bhikhu Parekh has commented:

'For Gandhi British imperialism dominated India at three related but different levels. At the political level the arrogant colonial government oppressed the Indian people and denied their right to run their affairs themselves. At the economic level it exploited and impoverished them, destroyed their indigenous industries and subordinated their interests to those of the British economy. In Gandhi's view this was far more disturbing than political oppression and could continue even if India became independent. At the most disturbing moral and cultural level, British imperialism destroyed the identity and integrity of Indian civilisation and turned the Indians into brown Englishmen. Gandhi was convinced that the rule of British *civilisation* could continue even if the British *government* were to stop ruling over India and British *capital* to cease exploiting it. British imperialism was unacceptable not only because of its political and even economic but moral and cultural consequences. The struggle against it had therefore to be mounted and independence obtained at all three levels, especially the last. At the cultural level the anti-imperialist struggle had to be fought on two fronts simultaneously. First, British civilisation, which so infatuated and blinded the Indians to the moral enormity of foreign rule and legitimised their economic and political domination must be subjected to a thorough-going critique. Second, the basic structure of Indian civilisation, which they largely saw through the biased British perspective, must be sensitively teased out and defended.

In interpreting British imperialism in this way, Gandhi integrated and went beyond the three different types of critique advanced by his predecessors. Broadly speaking Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Gokhale and the so-called liberals had welcomed the political and cultural advantages of British rule but attacked it on the grounds that it had drained India's wealth, ruined its industries, imposed unfair trading arrangements and subordinated its economic development to British colonial interests. Although mindful of its economic and cultural consequences, the leaders of the terrorist movements in Bengal and Maharashtra attacked it on political grounds and were the first to develop a distinctive theory of political as distinct from cultural nationalism. They argued that the Indians have as much right to run their affairs as the British had to run theirs, that colonialism was a form of slavery and outrage to Indian dignity and self-respect, and that the 'honour' of 'mother India' demanded that she should be freed of the 'foreign yoke'. In a culture which conceptualises energy in feminine terms and associates activity and restlessness with woman and passivity and detachment with *ma*, it was not at all surprising that the votaries of violence should have idealised 'mother' India and drawn inspiration from the Goddess Kali. Finally Vivekananda, B.C. Pal, Tilak and the so-called conservative leaders concentrated on the need to preserve the integrity of traditional ways of life and thought. They introduced the concept of Indian civilisation to match the one championed by the British, sharply distinguished the two and attacked foreign rule not so much because it involved economic exploitation and violated Indian pride as because it imposed an alien materialist civilisation on India's essentially spiritual one.

Gandhi's critique of British rule encompassed all three.....He was even more sensitive to the integrity of Indian civilisation than were the conservative leaders. Indeed he argued that most of them were even more interested in the 'synthesis' of the two civilisations

than in the integrity of their own, had unwittingly reinterpreted and anglicised it far more than they realised or cared to admit, and that their critique of British imperialism was half-hearted and lacked moral depth. Gandhi's critique not only included but also related and integrated the three earlier critiques into a comprehensive theoretical framework. He argued that political independence was important not only as an expression of India's pride and a necessary means to stop its economic exploitation but also to preserve its civilisation, without which political independence remained fragile. The economic exploitation had to be ended not only to sustain Indian independence and improve the living conditions of its people but also to preserve the social and economic basis of its civilisation.' (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp. 19-20)

In fact Gandhi saw India as a battleground between the immoral western civilisation of which the British were an excellent example (and which he was convinced would ultimately not last because it was based on immoral values like greed which led to violence) and the sustainable moral civilisation of India where the focus was on helping each soul find his spiritual salvation or God. In fact even in his own life that was his priority.

He wrote once: 'I count no sacrifice too great for the sake of seeing God face to face. The whole of my activity, whether it may be called social, political, humanitarian or ethical, is directed to that end. And as I know that God is found more often in the lowliest of His creatures than in the high and mighty, I am struggling to reach the status of these. I cannot do so without their service. Hence my passion for the service of the suppressed classes. And as I cannot render this service without entering politics, I find myself in them.' (Source: *Young India*, 1924)

His chosen way of reaching God was thus service of the poor and the oppressed but in a non-violent manner because violence would be sinful, non-spiritual, and non-religious. Thus he could not agree with Communists for instance who suggested that the rich and powerful will not give their relationship of dominance and exploitation of the poor and the weak without coercion or force because it was not to their advantage. But Gandhi's approach was to strive for a change of heart and shun violence strictly and under all provocations and circumstances.

He once told the wife of his British surgeon in 1924: 'My own motive is to put forth all my energy in an attempt to save Indian, that is, ancient culture, from impending destruction by modern, that is, Western culture being imposed upon India. The essence of ancient culture is based upon the practice of the utmost non-violence. Its motto is the good of all including every living thing, whereas Western culture is frankly based upon violence.' (Source: *Gandhi to Mrs. Maddock, Collected Works of MK Gandhi, Vol. 23, p. 243*)

While Gandhi was critical of the modern western civilisation and saw it as a danger he was not a nationalist in the narrow extreme sense, who hated other countries and wanted domination over them to spread his own version of what is superior civilisation. He was open to eventually spreading the message of his understanding of what should be a superior and sustainable civilisation to the whole world eventually but only after first establishing it well in the country of its origin. In fact he was not averse to using the term *Ram Raj* even to refer to the India of his dreams even though the term is obviously open to communally sensitive interpretations.

But he had clarified that by ‘..Ramraj I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean by Ramraj Divine Raj, The Kingdom of God’. (Source: *Young India*, Sept. 19, 1929) Further clarity on his conception of Ram Raj can be obtained from his other comments like:

‘The Ramraj of my dream ensures the rights alike of prince and pauper.’ (Source: *Anand Bazar Patrika*, Aug. 2, 1934)

‘There can be no Ramraj in the present state of iniquitous inequalities, in which a few roll in riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat.’ (Source: *Harijan*, June 1, 1947)

‘The ancient ideal of Ramraj is undoubtedly one of true democracy, in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure.’ (Source: *Young India*, Sept. 19, 1929)

As is clear from the above, to understand Gandhian nationalism it is important to understand his critique of modern western civilisation. Gandhi wanted Indian nationalism to be about rejecting the British and western model of modern civilisation and a return to the basics of what he saw as India’s ancient genius. He was deeply aware that most people arguing for freedom were not appreciative quite so much of the glory of that civilisation and merely wanted a change of political rulers.

He once commented: ‘[You] want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger’s nature, not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but *Englistan*. That is not the Swaraj I want.’ (Source: *Hind Swaraj*, p. 15)

Prof. Bhikhu Parekh has succinctly explained Gandhi’s understanding of modern civilisation as follows:

‘For Gandhi modern civilisation was propelled by the two inter-related principles of greed and want. It was controlled by ‘a few capitalist owners’ who had only one aim, to make profit, and only one means to do so, to produce goods that satisfied people’s wants. They had a vital vested interest in constantly whetting jaded appetites, planting new wants and creating a moral climate in which not to want the goods daily pumped into the market and to keep pace with the latest fashions was to be abnormal and archaic. Indeed, since self-discipline or restriction of desires, the very emblem of human dignity, threatened to cause mass unemployment, throw the economic system out of gear and cause human suffering, it was seen as anti-social and immoral. Not surprisingly men saw themselves not as self-determining moral subjects but as consumers or vehicles for the satisfaction of externally-induced wants.

The capitalist search for profits led to mechanisation and ‘industrialism’. For Gandhi machines relieved drudgery, created leisure, increased efficiency and were indispensable when there was a shortage of labour. Their use must therefore be guided by a well-considered moral theory indicating how men should live, spend their free time and relate to one another. Since the modern economy lacked such a theory and was only propelled by the search for profit, it mechanised production without any regard for its wider moral, cultural and other consequences. Machines were introduced even when there was no obvious need for them and were in fact likely to throw thousands out of work. This was justified either in the name of increased leisure without anyone asking why it was important and what to do with it, or of cheaper goods, as if man was only a passive consumer and not an active moral being for whose sanity, self-respect and dignity the right to work was far more important than the febrile gratification of trivial wants. Treated with the veneration and awe accorded to Gods in primitive societies, machines had come to cast a magic spell on modern man and followed their own will. For Gandhi the mechanisation or

fetishism of technology was closely tied up with the larger phenomenon of industrialism, another apparently self-propelling and endless process of creating larger and larger industries with no other purpose than to produce cheap consumer goods and maximise profit. He argued that since modern economic life followed an inexorable momentum of its own, it reduced men to its helpless and passive victims and represented a new form of slavery, more comfortable and invidious and hence more dangerous than the earlier ones.

Based on the belief that life was continuous motion and movement, that unless one was constantly on the move one was not alive and that the faster the tempo of life the more alive one was, modern civilisation was inherently restless and intolerant of stability. It aimed to conquer time and space and developed increasingly speedier modes of transport and communication. Cars were replaced by trains and the later by planes, but no one asked why one needed to travel so fast and what one intended to do with the time saved. Thanks to its restless and 'mindless activism' incorrectly equated with dynamism and energy, modern civilisation undermined man's unity with his environment and fellow men and destroyed stable and long-established communities. In the absence of natural and social roots and stable and enduring landmarks which alone gave man a sense of identity and continuity, modern man had become abstract, indeterminate and empty. He was not internally or organically related to others and his relations with them were not grounded in the sentiments of fellow feeling and good will. Everyone was a stranger to everyone else and no one cared for or knew how to behave towards others.....

In Gandhi's view the exploitation of one's fellow men was built into the very structure of modern civilisation. Consumers were constantly manipulated into desiring things they did not need and which were not in their long-term interest. Workers were made to do boring jobs at subsistence wages under inhuman conditions and given little opportunity or encouragement to develop their intellectual and moral potential. The poor were treated with contempt and held responsible for their own misfortunes. The weaker races were treated as if they were animals and bought and sold and brutally exploited. The weaker nations were conquered, mercilessly oppressed and used as dumping grounds for surplus goods and as sources of cheap raw materials. For Gandhi imperialism was only an acute manifestation of the aggressive and exploiting impulse lying at the very heart of modern civilisation and at work in all areas of human relationships.' (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp. 22-23)

Gandhi was troubled by the fact that modern civilisation entailed a certain surrender of the individual to the institutionalised modern state which undermined the individual's cultivation of his human powers of self-determination, autonomy, self-knowledge (in the spiritual sense), self-discipline and social cooperation. Gandhi was naturally therefore not very impressed by modern institutions and systems of education, law, medicine, media etc and even the system of a modern democratic state led by the functioning of a parliament at the top. Gandhi was deeply disturbed by the education system that the modern British western state had imposed on India as can be judged from his following comment in a letter to an associate:

'the system of education at present in vogue is wholly unsuited to India's needs, is a bad copy of the Western model and it has by reason of the medium of instruction being a foreign language sapped the energy of youths who have passed through our schools and colleges and has produced an army of clerks and office-seekers. It has dried up all originality, impoverished the vernaculars and has deprived the masses of the benefit of higher knowledge which would otherwise have percolated to them through the intercourse of the educated classes with them. The system has resulted in creating a gulf between educated India and the masses. It has stimulated the brain but starved the spirit for want of a religious basis for education and emaciated the body for want of training in handicrafts. It has criminally neglected the greatest need of India in that there is no

agricultural training worth the name.....' (Source: *Collected Works of MK Gandhi, Vol. 14*) Gandhi was deeply disturbed by the fact that modern western English education was creating a divide in Indian society between those who were English educated and those who were not. Professor Judith Brown in her biography of Gandhi has explained how this led to Gandhi's search for a common national language – probably one of the first people to carry out this task. She has commented:

'His increasing emphasis on the divisiveness of contemporary Indian education showed his growing identification with the poor in his homeland rather than with the educated with whom he would naturally have fitted by virtue of his own education and professional training. His concern for what education was doing to India and Indians also led him into deeper consideration of the problem of finding a genuinely national language rather than English, with all its drawbacks of social exclusiveness and association with the political and cultural rejection of the nation's own rich heritage. As early as December 1916 he presided at a conference on this issue; in October 1917 he was president of a Gujarat educational conference at which he dealt with the question of a national language as well as wider educational issues. His preference was for Hindi as spoken by north Indians, Muslim and Hindu, which could be written in either Devanagari or Persian scripts. This was to be a significant aspect of his work for a new national identity and true *swaraj* until the end of his life'. (Source: *Judith M. Brown, Gandhi – Prisoner of Hope, p. 107, Oxford University Press*)

Gandhi was against the whole attitude and approach of modern western allopathic medical science. In fact in his own personal life he experimented with Indian healing methods whenever possible in his ashrams and elsewhere and would be much disturbed if he had to see a doctor either for himself or any of his family members.

Gandhi was also deeply distressed with the British system of law even though he was a London trained lawyer himself professionally. Bhikhu Parekh has brought out Gandhi's objections to the British system of legal dispute resolution rather well: 'Gandhi thought that ... dehumanising phenomenon ... was evident in the field of law. Men were intelligent and moral beings capable of resolving their differences by discussing them in the spirit of charity and good will or by seeking the arbitration of widely respected men and women in their community. Instead, every time he failed to get what he thought was his due, modern man rushed to the court of law where trained experts in the esoteric body of legal knowledge conducted expensive and incomprehensible debates about him without his participation. ...the legal establishment reduced him to a case to be discussed as if he were a child to be tutored into what to say about his own actions and incapable of participating in their evaluation. ... the legal system did little to develop and mobilise man's moral impulses and capacities for reflection and introspection. Instead it required him to alienate them to a central agency telling him how to run his life and conduct his relations with others, including his own neighbours, wife, ex-wife and children. Gandhi found it strange that modern man who talked so much about his self-respect and dignity, did not find all this deeply humiliating.' (Source: *Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy, p. 27*)

In fact Gandhi was not convinced even by the western model of the state itself.

He once commented: 'The state represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul but the state is a soul-less machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.' (Source: *The Modern Review, Oct.1935*)

Prof. Bhikhu Parekh has explained well the reason why Gandhi saw the modern state as violent: 'Gandhi argued that the highly centralised and bureaucratic modern state enjoying and jealously guarding its monopoly of political power was a necessary product of modern civilisation. Competitive and aggressive men ruthlessly pursuing their own interests could only be held together by a well-armed state. Since they were all strangers to one another and lacked the bond of good will and mutual concern, their relations could only be regulated by impersonal rules imposed and enforced by such a powerful external agency as the state. The centralisation of production in the modern economy created social and economic problems of national and international magnitude, and again required a centralised political agency to deal with them. Unemployment, poverty and the social and economic inequalities created by the modern economy led to acute and legitimate discontent and required a well armed state to deter its desperate citizens from resorting to violence. 'Shorn of all the camouflage the exploitation of the masses of Europe is sustained by violence', Gandhi argued. The centralised modern state was also necessary to protect international markets and overseas investments.....Even as the state monopolised all political power, it tended to monopolise all morality. Since its atomic and morally depleted citizens lacked organic bonds and the capacity to organise and run their social relations themselves, the state was the sole source of moral order. It alone guaranteed civilised existence and saved society from social disintegration. As such it came to be seen as the highest moral institution, whose preservation was a supreme moral value.

Gandhi argued that, although the state claimed to be a moral institution transcending narrow group interests and pursuing the well being of the whole community, it was in fact little more than an arena of conflict between organised interests manipulated and controlled by the more powerful among them. Since men of independent spirit and honour generally avoided it, it was largely in the care of men and women forging convenient alliances with powerful interest groups and using it to serve their interests. Gandhi thought that in these respects the democratic governments were no better than the undemocratic and belonged to the 'same species'. They were just as vulnerable to the pressures of the dominant class and just as 'ruthless' and ready to use violence in the pursuit of its interests. In its actual practice a democracy was basically a form of government in which a 'few men capture power in the name of the people and abuse it', a 'game of chess' between rival parties with the people as 'pawns'. Although the fact that democratic government was periodically elected by and accountable to ordinary people made a difference, it also served as a 'camouflage' hiding the basic fact that the masses were often 'exploited by the ruling class....under the sacred name of democracy'. Democracy thus veiled and conferred moral legitimacy on the reality of exploitation, and had only a marginal moral edge over fascism.' (Source: *ibid.*, pp. 28-29)

Gandhi believed that parliament is basically a 'talking shop' where the political parties manipulate public opinion to maintain their positions of power and sub-serve the interests of powerful people and who followed the party line without referring issues to the test of their consciences. Gandhi also felt in a electoral democracy the voters are susceptible to thinking along the lines of short term interests and were influenced by the media. He saw the media functioning of modern civilisation with deep suspicion. He once commented on the newspapers (there was no broadcast media or television at that time and newspapers were the main media outlets) in Britain:

'To the English voters their newspapers is their Bible. They take their cue from their newspapers which are often dishonest. The same fact is differently interpreted by different newspapers, according to the party in whose interests they are edited.' (*Hind Swaraj*, p. 33)

Gandhi believed in a modern capitalist system independence of the press is a mere slogan and media independence is impossible because the press was owned by the capitalist class for manufacturing public opinion. They were not concerned with truth but propaganda of what served the interests of the owners and their friends and did not serve the purpose of educating public opinion.

Therefore for Gandhi the task was to build a new nation which will preserve its own civilisation. This strength according to Gandhi was to be found mainly in the way of life and civilisation of India's villages. Bikhu Parekh comments: 'In Gandhi's view every civilisation had its own distinctive natural and social basis. Modern civilisation was born and could only survive in the cities, and was naturally carried all over the world by the commercial classes. Indian civilisation had, by contrast, been cradled and nurtured in the villages, and only the rural masses were its natural custodians. So long as their way of life was intact, its integrity and survival was guaranteed. If the villages were to disappear and their traditional moral and social structure was to be shattered, it would lose its socio-economic basis and its fate would be sealed forever. Since the civilisations that had so far come to India were all rural and thus posed no threat to it, it was easily able to accommodate and enter into a dialogue with them. Modern urban civilisation presented a deadly and unprecedented challenge and required a most discriminating and cautious response.' (Source: *Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 43)

Gandhi was convinced the British could conquer India mainly due to the selfishness and lack of unity of Indians and a degeneration in the national character. He thus saw it as a priority to rebuild the national character. Here his views are almost identical to what Swami Vivekananda had preached decades before. Gandhi came on the scene but could never gather much of a national audience for it outside the educated classes. Gandhi like Swami Vivekananda was particularly exercised about the degeneration of the Hindu character. He believed Indians (and Hindus in particular) had lost courage, physical, intellectual and moral. They could not take the moral decisions to decide what is right and wrong and then whatever the consequences stand up for it. Thus Indians ended up compromising in all kinds of indignities and humiliations and violations of the self-respect and personal dignity.

Gandhi thought Indians had lost the national character and 'would not fearlessly walk to the gallows or stand a shower of bullets and yet say "we will not work for you"'. (Source: *Collected Works*, Vol 14, p. 510) Gandhi further analysed it was the lack of courage in the national character that bred suspicion, distrust and jealousy and said 'What I would rid ourselves of is distrust of one another and imputation of motives. Our sin is not our differences but our littleness.... It is not our differences that really matter. It is the meanness behind it that is undoubtedly ugly'. (Source: *Young India*, 16 Feb, 1934) Again that it was because of the jealousy and mutual distrust that Indians were most 'uncharitable to one another' and blaming others rather than themselves for their mistakes had 'become a second nature with them'. (Source: *Raghavan Iyer, The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, vol. II, p. 539) Gandhi was convinced the British East India Company could not have established their presence in India leading to the eventual enslavement of India if different groups of selfish Indians had not done private deals with them and instead stood up as one in refusing to cooperate with the British empire. Bhikhu Parekh comments on how Gandhi also saw this as an explanation for the steady erosion of the ranks of the Hindus also. He says Gandhi felt:

'Thanks to their preoccupation with narrow personal interests and mutual distrust, the Indians lacked the capacity to pursue a common cause. Everyone went his own way and resisted the

discipline of a common organisation. They were 'like children in political matters....[who] do not understand the principle that the public good is also one's own good'. They did not take a long term view of their interests and appreciate that these were best secured within a larger organisational framework whose preservation benefited them all. In Gandhi's view they only acted in a concerted manner when inspired and organised by great leaders and broke up into loose atoms once the later disappeared.

Gandhi also pointed to the absence of a social conscience among his countrymen. They were 'callous' about the conditions of the poor and underprivileged. Their doctrine of the unity of man had remained merely 'philosophical' and was rarely practiced, which is why a large number of lower caste Hindus had embraced such egalitarian religions as Islam and Christianity.' (Source: *Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp. 47-48)

Gandhi's strong feelings about the inadequacy of the national character can be gauged from the following words of his:

'What are our failings, then, because of which we are helpless and cannot stop the profuse flow of wealth from our country, and in virtue of which our children get no milk, three crores of our people get only one meal a day, raids occur in broad daylight in Kheda district, and epidemics like plague and cholera cannot be eradicated in our country while they can in others? How is it that the haughty Sir Michael O'Dwyer and the insolent General Dyer can crush us like so many bugs and the priest in Shimla can write unworthy things about us; how is it that an intolerable injustice has been done to us in the Punjab?.'

The reason is our inveterate selfishness, our inability to make sacrifices for our country, our dishonesty, our timidity, our hypocrisy and our ignorance. Everybody is selfish, more or less, but we seem to be more selfish than others. We make some self-sacrifice in family matters, but very little of it for national work. Just look at our streets, our cities and our trains. In all these, we can see the condition of the country. How little attention is paid to the condition of others in streets, in the town as a whole and in trains?. We do not hesitate to throw refuse out of our courtyard on to the street; standing in the balcony, we throw out refuse or spit, without pausing to consider whether we are not inconveniencing the passers-by. When we are building a house, we take little thought of the inconvenience that may be caused to our neighbours. In cities, we keep the tap open, and thinking that it is not our water which flows away, we allow it to run waste. The same thing is seen in the trains. We secure a seat for ourselves by hook or crook and, if possible, prevent others from getting in. No matter if others are inconvenienced, we start smoking. We do not hesitate to throw banana skins and sugar-cane peelings right in front of our neighbours. When we go to draw from a tap, we take little thought for others. Many such instances of our selfishness can be listed.

Where so much selfishness exists, how can one expect self-sacrifice? Does the businessman cleanse his business of dishonesty for the sake of his country? Does he forgo his profit? Does he stop speculation in cotton for his country's sake? Is any effort made to keep down milk prices by giving up the profit from its export? How many give up a job when necessary, for the sake of the country? .

Where are the men who will reduce their luxuries and adopt simplicity and use the money so saved for the country? If it is necessary for the country's sake to go to jail, how many will come forward? .

Our dishonesty is there for all to see. We believe that business can never be carried on honestly. Those who have the chance never refuse a bribe... Our hypocrisy is only a little less

than that of the British. We have experience of this every moment. In our meeting and in all other activities of our lives, we try to show ourselves other than what we are.

We have made cowardice especially our own. Nobody wants bloodshed in connection with non-co-operation, and yet it is out of this fear of bloodshed that we do not want to do anything. We are possessed by the fear of the Government's armed might that we dare not take any step. And so we submit to force in every matter and allow dacoits to plunder us in broad daylight.

What shall I say about our hypocrisy? It has increased in every field. Weakness is always accompanied by hypocrisy. Moreover, where the people want to be upright but can not be so, hypocrisy will naturally increase; for, if we are not upright, we are anxious to seem so and thus we add another moral weakness to the one which we already possess. Hypocrisy had entered our religion as well, and that so fully that the marks which we put on our forehead, the rosary and things of that kind have ceased to be tokens of piety and become signs of impiety.' (Source: Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, vol. I, pp.307f)

Gandhi was determined that the most important task in the task of building a strong national identity and a nationalist character – a process he referred to as national regeneration, was to reform the character of Indians. And in this he saw no use in a blind adoption of western modern civilisation. He was of the conviction that while western civilisation may not all be totally bad (even though he did think it was inferior to India's naturally spiritual minded civilisation) Indians had to adopt what suited Indians and was good for India. He was of the view the Indian civilisation had been evolved by the Indian people and reflected their unique and historically emerged *swabhava*.

Interestingly Gandhi was also not exactly in favour of going back to the exact situation of ancient Vedic times as he believed every age had its own *yug-dharma* and the task of Indians was only to take inspiration and guidance from the past but devise a new *yug-dharma* for the modern times.

The Gandhian programme for national regeneration according to Bhikhu Parekh was 'highly complex and involved a cluster of inter-related strategies of which cultivating the *swadeshi* spirit, *satyagraha* and the Constructive Programme were the most important.' Swadeshi was at the heart of Gandhian nationalism and it is important to understand his understanding of it because even though its origins predated Gandhi's entry in the freedom struggle he had a greater impact in making it widely respected and followed and of course he also redefined it. Bikhu Parekh explains Gandhi's wide meaning of *swadeshi* beautifully as follows and deserves to be quoted in full:

'For Gandhi every man was born and grew up in a specific community with its own distinct ways of life and thought evolved over a long period of time. The community was not a mere collection of institutions and practices but an ordered and well knit whole informed by a specific spirit and ethos. It provided its members with an organised environment vital for their orderly growth, a ready network of supportive relationships, a body of institutions and practices essential for structuring their otherwise chaotic selves, a foci for sentiments and loyalties without which no moral life was possible and a rich culture. In these and other ways it profoundly shaped their personalities, modes of thought and feeling, deepest instincts and aspirations and their innermost being. Every community in turn was inextricably bound up with a specific natural environment

within which it had grown up, which had cradled and nursed it and in the course of interacting with which it had developed its distinctive customs, habits and ways of life and thought. The natural environment was not external to it but integrated into its history and culture and suffused with its collective memories, images, hopes and aspirations. As Gandhi put it, a community's culture or way of life constituted its soul or spirit and its natural habitat its body. The two formed an indissoluble unity and inescapable basis of human existence.

...Gandhi used the term *Swadesh* to refer to this unity, *swa* meaning one's own and *desh* the total cultural and natural environment of which one was an inseparable part. *Desh* was both a cultural and ecological unit and signified the traditional way of life obtaining within a specific territorial unit. The territorial reference was as important as the cultural. *Desh* did not mean a state or a polity for a way of life might not be organised in such a manner; nor a mere piece of territory unless it was inhabited and culturally appropriated by a community of men sharing a common way of life; nor a cultural group unless it occupied a specific territorial unit and its cultural boundaries coincided with the territorial. The castes, religious and cultures constituting the Indian mosaic were not *deshas*; India, a civilisational cum territorial unit, uniting them all in terms of a common way of life was. In classical Indian political thought every territorial unit distinguished by a distinct way of life was called a *desh* and India was a *desh* composed of smaller *deshas*, each a distinct cultural and ecological unit but united with the others by a shared civilisation. Gandhi agreed except that he thought of the constituent units as *pradeshas* or subordinate or *quasi-deshas*.

The *swadeshi* spirit which Gandhi variously translated as the community, national or patriotic spirit or the spirit of nationality and sharply distinguished from nationalism, basically referred to the way an individual related and responded to his *desh*. Since he was profoundly shaped by and unintelligible outside it, he should accept the inescapable fact that it was the necessary basis and context of his existence and that he owed his humanity to it. He should show a basic existential loyalty and gratitude to it and accept his share of the responsibility to preserve its integrity. He should recognise himself as an heir to the countless generations of men and women whose efforts and sacrifices made it what it is and cherish his heritage.' (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp.56-57)

Prof. Judith Brown has commented that *swadeshi* was an essential part of Gandhi's spiritual philosophy of simplicity in material living, which in turn would make it possible for Indians to rely on their essential strength. She comments: 'An integral part of Gandhi's thinking on simplicity of living was the idea of *swadeshi*, literally meaning 'belonging to one's own country'. It was a politico-economic strategy which had been employed against the British in India while Gandhi was in South Africa. But to him it had a far deeper meaning than the mere boycott of British goods in as attempt to erode the financial aspects of British interests in India. For Gandhi it was inextricably tied to the values of simplicity and self-reliance, of limiting one's wants, and of the worth of manual labour.' (Source: Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi – Prisoner of Hope*, pp.90-91, Oxford University Press)

Writing in 1909 Gandhi wrote: 'Swadeshi carries a great and profound meaning. It does not mean merely the use of what is produced in one's country....there is another meaning implicit in it which is far greater and much more important. *Swadeshi* means reliance on our own strength.' (Source: *Indian Opinion*, 1909)

Satyagraha was an important part of Gandhi's national regeneration campaign and his main tool for political struggle – a method that he devised because he found it most in tune with

the Indian's character but which has now indeed become internationally famous and even in this country has undergone a strange sort of distorted revival at least in popular art because of the popularising of what has come to be known as 'Gandhigiri' after the success of a Bollywood film where this term was first used. Gandhiji had decided that from the spiritual point of view non-violence is sin and unacceptable but one nevertheless had to find a way for standing up to the *truth* of exploitation whenever it happened and struggle to stop it. What was his answer – his answer was what he called satyagraha. He saw in the strategy of *satyagraha* many advantages but none of the disadvantages of military training. It was free from blame of violence but required courage all the same. It could be carried out at different levels (from simple protest meetings to even sacrifice of life) and by different sections of the population (from children to women even). Most importantly it relied for its success on the strength of numbers, which India could provide in plenty owing to its huge population. Also it could be withdrawn easily and rapidly once started and did not necessarily escalate into anything bloody involving death. It required a strange kind of courage based on the quite obstinacy and tenacity of purpose, which Gandhi probably saw, as one of the main characteristics of Indians, specially the rural masses. The *satyagraha* strategy had the further advantage that it never need be declared to have failed once started. One could always withdraw claiming partial success. As it did not involve a direct forceful challenge to the government, it denied the latter the excuse to use indiscriminate and massive violence that could frighten and prematurely kill a movement. Also if the government did become violent, it lost good will and political mileage. On the other hand if it agreed to the demands it meant the agitating masses gained a sense of success and power. Gandhi called *satyagraha* the 'trump-card' and regarded it as particularly suited to India. Gandhi himself had said that he never told the people involved that they were about to stage a *satyagraha*, he simply led the protest and later told them later that they in fact had already launched a *satyagraha*. *Satyagraha* was a fascinating example of the *swadeshi* spirit because instead of condemning the lack of courage and some abstractly desirable qualities of character in the Indian people, it accepted and built on those that they had in plenty.

Another important element in Gandhi's national regeneration idea was to carry out what he called his Constructive Programme. He believed India needed to be built up from the very bottom and only that would create the social, economic and ultimately moral and spiritual revolution that in his idea of Indian nationhood has to be the priority in contrast with other nations. He believed other nations may focus on other things but in India the task was to preserve and manifest our spiritual genius. Gandhi identified eighteen essential areas: Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, a ban on alcohol or prohibition, the promotion and use of khadi, development of village industries and craft based education, equality for women, health education for promoting Indian systems of medicine and the Indian way of healthy living, use of indigenous languages or vernaculars, the adoption of a common national language for which his preference was hindi, the promotion of what he called economic trusteeship, building up peasants and workers organisations, integration of the tribal people into mainstream political and economic life, a detailed code of conduct for students, helping lepers and beggars and promoting respect for animals. In this entire list and how Gandhi proposed to go about them the one major point to remember is that Gandhi would only accept and approve of non-violent methods even if they weren't practical or productive of concrete results in the short term or a reasonable period of time. For instance, Gandhi was convinced untouchability could be abolished by personal example and active promotion of the cause. He was convinced a change of heart was all that was needed and a non-violent persuasion without the least coercion, legal or otherwise, was only morally acceptable and enough to get rid of even such horrible evils. Similarly with the problem of the rich-poor divide and poverty and the continued economic exploitation by the upper classes

Gandhi was for promoting what he called 'trusteeship' or the notion among the rich that they hold the wealth on behalf of the entire people and it was their duty to personally use only the least bit of it and do the utmost for the poor. He was not convinced that they may not want to give up their position of enjoyment of wealth for the public good just by moral sermons and that there may be needed laws and a state directed, at least partial re-distribution of property to eradicate poverty and the class system that perpetuated the riches of some and the poverty of many. And the reason is all coercion, legal or otherwise, was violent to him and not in tune with his principle of *ahimsa*. In fact that was the stated reason of his for rejecting socialism and communism. He bluntly said: 'What does communism mean in the last analysis? It means a classless society – an ideal that is worth striving for. Only I part company with it when force is called to aid for achieving it.' (Source: *Harijan*, March 13, 1937) Again: 'Our Socialism or Communism, should be based on non-violence and on harmonious co-operation of labour and capital, landlord and tenant.' (Source: *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, August 3, 1934) Or: 'Communism of the Russian type, that is communism which is imposed on a people, would be repugnant to India. If communism came without any violence, it would be welcome. For, then, no property would be held by anybody except on behalf the people and for the people. A millionaire may have his millions, but he will hold them for the people.' (Source: *Harijan*, March 13, 1941) So Gandhi was ready to take the risk of having a millionaire class many of whose members were financiers of the Congress and Gandhi's ashrams and hope that they will stop acting in their own self-interest and instead act in the interests of the poor. Some Marxist commentators have suggested that for Gandhi the priority was a controlled mass movement so that the ruling upper classes and their advantageous positions were not threatened and the fact that he never suggested anything very radical was the secret of success of the Gandhian Congress. Historian Sumit Sarkar for instance has commented: 'As a politician and not just a saint, Gandhi in practice sometimes settled for less than complete non-violence (as when he campaigned for military recruitment in 1918 in the hope of winning post-war political concessions), and his repeated insistence that even violence was preferable to cowardly surrender to injustice sometimes created delicate problems of interpretation. But historically much more significant than his personal philosophy (full accepted only by a relatively small group of disciples) was the way in which the resultant perspective of controlled mass participation objectively fitted in with the interests and sentiments of socially-decisive sections of the Indian people. Indian politicians before Gandhi, as we have seen, had tended to oscillate between Moderate 'mendicancy' and individual terrorism basically because of their social inhibitions about uncontrolled mass movements. The Gandhian model would prove acceptable also to business, as well as to relatively better off or locally dominant sections of the peasantry, all of whom stood to lose something if political struggle turned into uninhibited and violent social revolution. In more general terms, as we shall see, the doctrine of *ahimsa* lay at the heart of the essentially unifying, 'umbrella-type' role assumed by Gandhi and the Gandhian Congress, mediating internal social conflicts, contributing greatly to joint national struggle against foreign rule, but also leading to periodic retreats and some major reverses.' (Source: *Sumit Sarkar, Modern India 1885-1947*, pp.179-80) Bhikhu Parekh has disagreed with Marxist commentators that Gandhi was a mascot or spokesman of the capitalist class and has commented Gandhi did agree eventually to use state power, on a suggestion from a group of socialists led by Prof. Dantwala, in a manner that he would have generally regarded as immoral and violent in what must be seen as an evolution of his thoughts. He has pointed out how Gandhi eventually agreed to impose if necessary trusteeship by law, a very high level of taxation to what was prevailing in his time and even a nationalising of vital industries. (Source: *Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 140) In general on the nationalist relevance of the Constructive Program he has rightly commented: 'Although several items in the Constructive Program had only a limited practical impact, its symbolic and pedagogical value was

considerable. First, for the first time during the struggle for independence, Indians were provided with a clear, albeit limited, statement of social and economic objectives. Second, they were specific and within the range of every one of them. In a country long accustomed to finding plausible alibis for inaction, Gandhi's highly practical programme had the great merit of ruling out all excuses. Third, his constant emphasis on it reminded the country that political independence had no meaning without comprehensive national regeneration, and that all political power was ultimately derived from a united and disciplined people. Finally, the Constructive Programme enabled Gandhi to build up a dedicated group of grass roots workers capable of mobilising the masses...As Gandhi understood them *satyagraha* was primarily concerned with the moral and political, and the Constructive Programme with the social and economic regeneration of India, and the *swadeshi* spirit was the overarching principle inspiring and guiding them.' (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 63)

Gandhi did more than anybody else to create and make popular the idea of an Indian nation. Unlike western notions of nation that is a homogenous and self-conscious ethnic and cultural or ethno-cultural unit, Gandhi fashioned an idea of a nation that was a synthesis of many cultures and religious faiths based on an appeal to the need for preserving the integrity of the way of life and culture of the Indian village. He argued the Indian village was very flexible in understanding and adopting influences from other cultures and had done so for thousands of years and had a traditional and sustainable way of life close to nature that they must hold on to at all cost. The genius of Gandhi was that he managed to convey in his own way this understanding of the Indian nation and his passionate nationalism to the poor and illiterate masses even. Prof. Judith Brown has concluded well when she writes:

'Gandhi was an ingenious and sensitive artist in symbols. In his own person as a self-denying holy man, by his speeches full of pictorial images and references to the great Hindu myths, by his emphasis on the *charkha* and on the wearing of *khadi* as a uniform to obliterate distinctions of region and caste, he portrayed and publicized in a world with few mass communications and low literacy, an ideal of an Indian nation which was accessible even to the poor and un-politicised. For many, at least for a time, the ideal of the nation and a sense of national identity were lifted out of the rough and often sordid world of politics, although the inevitable struggles and intrigues accompanying any shifts of power in a complex polity jostled uneasily with the vision of nationhood and often threatened to engulf it. A new nation had to be fashioned out of the numerous loyalties and contests for dominance, which were the stuff of Indian politics. Gandhi knew this full well as he agonized over political strategies, as he attempted to minimize conflict among Indians and generate a moral community which encompassed and purified old loyalties.'

(Source: Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi – Prisoner of Hope*, p. 386, Oxford University Press)

Gandhi adopted many methods to create a reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. On a day to day level he was always asking and cajoling Hindus, in his public speeches and utterances, to be friendly and decent with Muslims by avoiding playing music outside mosques or taking out processions and he would in turn ask Muslims to avoid cow slaughter. At a personal level he had close relationships with many Muslims and of course people from other faiths who usually maintained their lifelong friendships and loyalties to him which shows his feelings towards them were most likely entirely genuine and not part of any symbolism or political agenda necessarily. At the level of Congress politics his great move was seeking and making an alliance with Muslim groups for the Khilafat cause which he hoped would unite the two communities into one fighting political force. Later for various reasons his attempts failed.

For Gandhi, Hindu-Muslim divisions were unacceptable because his idea of Indian fundamentally had as one of its elements the harmonious co-existence and co-operation of different communities which functioned and lived together while at the same time maintained their distinct ideas and roles. Gandhi was passionate to uphold this view of what constituted Indian civilisation. His depth of feeling on the matter can be gauged from some of the following definitions of *swaraj* that he gave in 1921 in the Gujarati publication *Navajivan*:

(It may be noted Gandhi used to advance various definitions of *swaraj* to make his ideas clearer.)
'*Swaraj* means that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians, and Jews should all be able to follow their own faith and should respect those of others.'

'Complete disappearance of the evil passions in the hearts of Hindus and Muslims. This means that a Hindu should respect Muslim's feelings and should be ready to lay down his life for him, and *vice versa*. Muslims should not slaughter cows for the purpose of hurting Hindus; on the contrary, they should on their own refrain from cow-slaughter so as to spare the latter's feelings. Likewise, without asking for anything in return, Hindus should stop playing music before mosques with the purpose of hurting Muslims, should actually feel proud in not playing music while passing by a mosque.'

(Source: *Navajivan*, 14-08-1921, *Collected Works of MK Gandhi*, Vol. 20, p. 506)

A major part of his strategy was to work on removing the daily irritants in the relationship between Hindus and Muslims. He genuinely believed if Hindus and Muslims start behaving well with each other in a spirit of genuine friendship and decency and mutual tolerance for some time, then nothing would come in the way – not the British policy of 'divide and rule' nor the deep distrust between the two communities with its roots in history. His main appeal and attempt can be understood for instance from the following writing of his that was published in his journal *Young India* in 1921:

'That unity in strength is not merely a copybook maxim but a rule of life is in no case so clearly illustrated as in the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity. Divided we must fall. Any third power may easily enslave India so long as we Hindus and Mussulmans are ready to cut each other's throats. Hindu-Muslim unity means not unity only between Hindus and Mussulmans but between all those who believe India to be their home, no matter to what faith they belong. I am fully aware that we have not yet attained that unity to such an extent as to bear any strain. It is a daily growing plant, as yet in delicate infancy, requiring special care and attention. The thing became clear in Nellore when the problem confronted me in a concrete shape. The relations between the two were none too happy. They fought only about two years ago over what appeared to me to be a small matter. It was the eternal question of playing music whilst passing mosques. I hold that we may not dignify every trifle into a matter of deep religious importance. Therefore a Hindu may not insist on playing music whilst passing a mosque. He may not even quote precedents in his own or any other place for the sake of playing music. It is not a matter of vital importance for him to play music whilst passing a mosque. One can easily appreciate the Mussulman sentiment of having solemn silence near a mosque the whole of the twenty-four hours. What is a non-essential to a Hindu may be an essential to a Mussulman. And in all non-essential matters a Hindu must yield for the asking. It is criminal folly to quarrel over trivialities. The unity we desire will last only if we cultivate a yielding and a charitable disposition towards one another. The cow is as dear as life to a Hindu; the Mussulman should therefore voluntarily accommodate his Hindu bother. Silence at his prayer is a precious thing for a Mussulman. Every Hindu should voluntarily respect his Mussulman brother's sentiment. This however is a counsel of perfection. There are nasty Hindus as there are nasty Mussulmans who would pick a quarrel for nothing. For these we must provide *panchayats* of unimpeachable probity and imperturbability whose

decisions must be binding on both parties. Public opinion should be cultivated in favour of the decisions of such *panchayats* so that no one would question them.

I know that there is much, too much distrust of one another as yet. Many Hindus distrust Mussulman honesty. They believe that swaraj means Mussulman raj, for they argue that without the British, Mussulmans of India will aid Mussulman powers to build a Mussulman empire in India. Mussulmans on the other hand fear that the Hindus, being in an overwhelming majority, will smother them. Such an attitude of mind betokens impotence on either's part. If not their nobility, their desire to live in peace would dictate a policy of mutual trust and mutual forbearance. There is nothing in either religion to keep the two apart. The days of forcible conversion are gone. Save for the cow, Hindus can have no ground for quarrel with Mussulmans. The latter are under no religious obligation to slaughter a cow. The fact is we have never before now endeavoured to come together to adjust our differences and to live as friends bound to one another as children of the same sacred soil.'

(Source: *Young India*, May 11, 1921)

The Khilafat Movement was a reaction against imperial British expansion in the context of the First World War. As the war progressed what shocked Indians the most, particularly Muslims, was the dismantling of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The Turkish Caliph was looked upon by large sections of Indian Muslims as their religious head particularly since the end of the Mughal Empire in 1857. Turkey was the also largest Muslim power at the time of the First World War. So the decisions of the allies in complete violation of the pre-war promise of Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister of preserving the Ottoman Empire came as a jolt. The allies decision to break up the Ottoman Empire and the landing of Greeks and Italians in Turkey shocked the Indian muslims who felt any weakening of the Caliphate would weaken the position of muslims who were under imperialist domination elsewhere in the world. The reaction took the form of what came to be known as the Khilafat Movement. The young muslims of India of India over night became deeply anti-imperialist and anti-British and therefore nationalist. This was a set back in terms of power over muslims for the traditional upper class leadership of the Muslim League who had all along kept on arguing that the interests of the muslims was different from that of Hindus and the muslims should side with the British to have an advantage over Hindus. A negative side to this though was the fact that now the educated and fairly militant nationalist muslim was entering the realm of political activity not with a secular radical approach like his Hindu brothers to rise up against the economic and political exploitation of Indians by an imperialist power but because holy places in far away Turkey were in danger and because the Turkish Caliphate was under threat. The whole appeal was on narrow religious lines and the cultural appeal that went with it was of the middle-east and not of South Asia.

It was one of Gandhi's main strategic moves to take up the issue of Khilafat which excepting a very small rather fundamentalist fringe, the vast majority of Muslims were not really very enthusiastic about as it involved the questions of far away Turkey and did not really touch the lives of the average Indian Muslim. Gandhi hoped that Khilafat will endear Hindus to Muslims and remove the deep distrust and chasm in terms of identity. The move to adopt the Khilafat cause surprised Hindus and even many in the Congress but Gandhi was adamant that it should be taken up with full energy. He even linked it to the Hindu's desire to see cow-slaughter end and told them the way forward was through Khilafat. For instance in a speech in Kanpur in 1921 he said: '...Cow protection also depends on Khilafat. Hindus must be prepared to make sacrifices for Khilafat without desiring anything in return. Every morning I pray for the cows.

Cow slaughter is the result of the sins committed by Hindus; it is owing to these sins that we are deprived of the sympathy of our brethren. We must repent for those sins. For a satisfactory solution of the Khilafat question it is of utmost importance that there should be Hindu-Muslim unity. Khilafat alone will unite the two communities'. (Source: *Collected Works of MK Gandhi*, Vol. 20, p. 482)

EXERCISES

1. Discuss Gandhi's role in the national movement from the point of view of the new ideas, techniques and symbols that he introduced.
2. Discuss Gandhi's adoption and participation in the Khilafat Movement from the point of view of his strategy to foster communal amity and unity between Hindus and Muslims.

SUGGESTED READING

Collected Works of M.K. Gandhi

MAKING OF THE MODERN COLONIAL STATE

.....Amaresh Ganguli
Zakir Hussain College
University of Delhi

Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The colonial attempt at estimating the composition and quantum of their subjects
- Constitutional Developments (1858-1935)

The British when ruling India, one of their major anxieties particularly after the revolt of 1857 was that Indians should not be able to unite and oppose their rule since in that revolt large parts of the people had united in an attempt at overthrowing their rule and according to some historians had almost succeeded. So naturally they wished to understand the composition of the Indian population and the quantum of the various castes and communities so that they may be able to implement their policy of divide and rule more efficiently. They also wished to understand the culture and customs and special traits of the various communities so that they may be able to draft the right kind of people in their various services like for instance the armed forces where to this day they have a special Gorkha Regiment in Britain as they understood very early that Gorkhas are endowed with have special fighting instincts.

One of their major initiatives in understanding their colonial subjects was the decision to conduct a national census. It is interesting the idea of a census was mooted in several countries of Europe during the 18th century out of concern over the extent of poverty and to see what relief is therefore necessary by way of government aid. Over time this concern led to a debate around the question of the impact of population growth on poverty and in Britain in 1753 the first bill for a national census was introduced in the parliament. The bill sought to provide for the collection of information on the size of population, vital statistics, total number of poor receiving alms from parishes etc. The bill was however defeated because it was perceived as being a potentially repressive measure but after the publication of 'An Essay on Population' in 1798 by Thomas Malthus the need for a census got a fresh lease of life and finally, the House of Commons passed the act for 'taking account of the population of Great Britain and the increase or decrease thereof' on December 3, 1800. The first British census was conducted on March 10, 1801 and every 10 years thereafter. Thus economic concerns were first predominant and behind the initiation of in the start of census taking in Great Britain. In India on the other hand, census had a different purpose altogether and was motivated by the desire on the part of the British to learn all it could about the people and land under its control. A few years before the first census in colonial India in 1872, the work on gazetteers was begun by W. W. Hunter, on the direction of Lord Mayo, which culminated years later in several volumes of the Imperial Gazetteers of India. Both the gazetteers and census reports covered large number of subjects dealing with land and people of the different parts of India. Whereas in the census exercises in Great Britain there was no question on religion and wherever any question on religion was included, it was done with great care and restraint, in the colonial census of India, the question on religion, caste and race was introduced from the very beginning since the very first carried out in 1872. In fact religion was used as a fundamental category in census tabulations and data on this published without any restraint. Indeed the main purpose was to develop a database for dealing with communal issues and encourage communal aspirations and demands as opposed to nationalist demands which

treated India as one people. The census tabulations based on religion and caste enabled imperialist historians to assert the period classifications of Indian history in terms of Hindu and Muslim periods unlike in European history which was classified simply as ancient, medieval and modern. There was a clear purpose to it seems to project cleavages in India society through a variety of texts, forms and methods which would encourage people to think in terms of their narrow communal identities and not in terms of a national Indian identity.

In India from time immemorial numerous communities existed in India but they neither knew nor were bothered to know their exact population count. Social and economic calamities (like wars or famines and floods) were suffered together and there was no advantage to be had in knowing the strength of your population sub-group. Thus there was fuzziness, in terms of awareness of the population composition as broken down into castes and religious communities. Naturally therefore arguments and antagonisms around communal strengths and entitlements were both unnecessary and unknown and only began in the sense that it happens to this day (as India undertakes census 2011) by the counting of heads undertaken by the British.

In this context R. B. Bhagat has rightly commented: 'Colonialism changed this blissful state of social ignorance through census. Enumeration and categorisation for reasons of state had a deep social impact. It is in this context that the very concept of majority and minority in religious terms is an outcome of a modern consciousness of population numeracy, in particular of the census exercises that were taken in the 19th century. Numbers became a political tool as Hindus were told that they constituted a majority and an effort was made to persuade them to act as a uniform community regardless of sect, caste or class affiliation. Before head counts of people were announced, it was neither possible nor necessary for communities across the land to identify themselves with any degree of preciseness and to seek similarities or differences with others outside their immediate kin. There was, thus no general Hindu community and people defined themselves with reference to their specific modes of worship as localised Shaivites (worshippers of Shiva) or Shakts (Worshippers of the Mother Goddess) or Vaishnavas (worshippers of various incarnations Ram, Krishna, etc of Vishnu) and soon.... Indeed, in the pre-modern periods, it is doubtful if even the Muslim ummah (global community) had any more than a symbolic meaning. The censuses however, not only counted people but also pigeonholed them and made it possible for them to seek self-definition in terms that were set for them by external enumerations. There is a little historical evidence of sustained communal hatred operating at the popular level prior to colonial rule. The fuzzy communities had been turned into enumerated communities and further into political communities by the colonialists. *Divide et imperia* was the foundation of British rule suggested for adoption as early as 1821 and the application of this maxim was first tried out in the reorganisation of the Indian army after the great revolt of 1857. At this juncture of history, the census counts first tried out in 1872 aided in the articulation of the cleavages of majority and minority, a handmaiden in creating communal consciousness in the early 20th century.... The census figures also provided the geographical distribution of religious communities. Both size of religious communities and their distribution was used to widen the rift between religious communities particularly between Hindus and Muslims. Numerous such examples are found with the intent to perpetuate divisions in Indian society along caste, religion and linguistic lines. The division of Bengal based on religion in 1905 was the most glaring example of fomenting communalism by the British policy of divide and rule. A new province of East Bengal and Assam was created with predominance of Muslims in East Bengal in 1905. In Dacca in February 1904, Curzon spoke of offering the East Bengal Muslims the prospect of unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Musalman viceroys and kings. Therefore, the census exercise during colonial rule instilled a geographical

and demographic consciousness among religious communities of an awareness of their geographical concentration as well as their demographic strength. The new communal consciousness was further perpetuated through the political instrument of separate electorates wherein religious minorities were given separate seats in the legislative bodies according to their proportion of population in the provinces. Mushirul Hasan believes that the roots of communal competition can be traced to the Morley-Minto Reforms, which extended communal electorate to the local bodies. Even the seats in government medical college Lahore was distributed in the ratio of 40: 40: 20 amongst Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in Punjab. As a result communal antagonism in the country was sharpened. Hindus and Muslims practically organised themselves against each other in hostile camps. It exacerbated Hindu-Muslim divisions and fostered the spirit of political exclusiveness. The impact was particularly marked on Muslims who saw the advantage of pressing for special safeguards and concessions in accordance with numerical strength, social status, local influence and social requirement of their community. (Source: R.B. Bhagat, 'Census and the Construction of Communalism in India', *Commentary in Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, 24 Nov, 2001)

Constitutional Developments (1858-1935)

The origins of the modern Constitution of India are rooted in the history of India under the British. (Source: M.V. Pylee, 'Constitutional Government in India', Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p.47)

The Regulating Act of 1773 had historically been the first step that the British Crown had taken towards taking charge away from the East India Company and establishing a system of governance in India based on written codes of law, itself a novelty for the Indian culture of thousands of years, which culminated nearly a hundred years later and through many acts and constitutional changes in between in the Act of 1858, after the Indian Revolt of 1857. The Queen Victoria in that proclamation of 1858, which brought the century old rule of the East India Company to an end, said among other things:

'We shall respect the rights, dignity and honour of native princes as our own; and we desire that they, as well as our subjects, should enjoy that prosperity and social advancement which can only be secured by internal peace and good government.

We hold ourselves bound to the natives of our Indian territories by the same obligations of duty, which bind us to all our subjects, and those obligations, by the blessing of Almighty God, we shall faithfully and conscientiously fill.

We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions (religious) on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in any ways be favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure.

And it is our further will that, that so far as may be, our subjects, of whatever race or creed, be freely and impartially admitted to office in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability and integrity duly to discharge.

We know and respect the feelings of attachment with which the natives of India regard the lands inherited by them from their ancestors and we desire to protect them in all rights connected

therewith, subject to the equitable demands of the State; and we will that generally, in framing and administering the law, due regard be paid to the ancient rights and customs of India.

When, by the blessing of Providence, internal tranquillity shall be restored, it is our earnest desire to stimulate the peaceful industry of India, to promote works of public utility and improvement, and to administer the Government for the benefit of all our subjects resident therein. In their prosperity will be our strength, in their contentment our security, and in their gratitude our best reward...'. (Source: *ibid.* quoted in pages 59-60)

It can be argued the commitments in writing contained in the made above particularly in the third, fourth and fifth points were quite revolutionary in the Indian context of individual monarchs and their satraps having ruled for thousands of years, ruling pretty much on their whims and fancies. Also of course in many situations there had been a forcible imposition of the religion of the monarchs on the population particularly after a military victory as during the Mughal period. Consequently, in the commitment made in the third point above lies the acceptance of the notion of 'secularism'. This is not to suggest the British were trying to promote secularism in India.

The demand for greater peoples representation in the Governing Council, a democratic principle and hence an alien idea in the Indian culture of political governance essentially, which the Indian National Congress founded in 1885 made one of its main demands as well, was substantially accepted. Lord Curzon, while explaining the objects of the act said it was 'meant to widen the basis and expand the functions of the Government of India, and to give further opportunities to the non-official and native elements in Indian society to take part in the work of the Government', and in that way according to Pylee, 'to lend official recognition to that remarkable development both of political interest and political capacity that had been visible among the higher classes of Indian society since the Government of India was taken over by the Crown in 1858'. (Source: *ibid.* quoted in p.67)

A more real turn towards political reforms embodying greater democratic values came with the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909. Lord Minto had succeeded Lord Curzon as the Governor-General and Lord Morley, who was known as a radical disciple of Gladstone, had become the Secretary of State in the new Liberal Democratic government, the only time that that party has ruled Britain till date until recently when it has entered into a coalition with the Conservative Party. Lord Minto addressed the discontentment among Indians on various issues by proposing 'political reforms'. Morley independently, in England had come to the same conclusions and had been in constant correspondence with Minto. So there was a confluence of views between the Governor General and the Secretary of State, a situation not always readily available in the past. Morley had decided earlier that making political concessions was the way forward. While speaking in the House of Lords he had said:

'There are two rival schools of thought, one of which believes that better Government of India depends on efficiency, and that efficiency is in fact the end of British rule in India. The other school, while not neglecting efficiency, looks also to what is called political concessions'. (Source: M.V. Pylee, 'Constitutional Government in India', Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965, p. 68.)

A Royal Commission had been appointed known as the Royal Commission on Decentralisation and based on the recommendations of that commission an act was passed in 1909, popularly known as the Minto-Morley Reforms. The chief merit of the Act, says Pylee, "lay in its provisions to further enlarge the Councils and make them more representative and

effective". (Source: *Ibid.* p. 69) Their number of members on the Council were doubled or more than doubled and the proportion of official and non-official members was changed. The number of non-official members in both the Governors Legislative Council and the Provincial Legislatures were increased and for the first time in the Provinces, a non-official majority was actually established. The most important reform however, which perhaps introduced the concept of election for the first time in Indian history in a real sense, albeit in an indirect sense, was that of allowing for certain recognized bodies and associations to recommend candidates. Even though there was no obligation introduced to accept them, in practice the nominations were rarely rejected. Pylee points out the government, as a result of this reform, accepted the position that (i) election by the wishes of the people is the ultimate end to be secured, whatever may be the actual machinery adopted for giving effect to it, and (ii) that in the circumstances of India, representation by classes and interests was the only practicable method of embodying the principle in the constitution of the Legislative Councils, but also says that, the government by the acceptance of that latter principle marked the beginning of 'communal (religious) electorates' in India. (Source: *Ibid.* p.71) This was obviously a development that eventually later made it easier for the idea of Pakistan to manifest itself and find acceptance. Also when the idea of the Constituent Assembly came up, the idea for it to be constituted not on the lines of direct election based on adult franchise, but *indirectly* by giving much importance to the idea of representation to different religious communities and geographic regions and provincial legislatures (which were never representative anyway because they were elected by electorates composed of less than one-fourth of the population due to undemocratic qualification rules) was not found repugnant but a *convenience*.

Eventually though, for all its reformist face the Minto-Morley Reforms only whetted the by now growing appetite of politically conscious and progressive Indians who by now wanted nothing but the highest standards of constitutional government if they could have it. Pylee says, 'the disillusionment created by the Act of 1909 in the political atmosphere of India aggravated and reinforced the demand for self-government'and that the 'the Indian people found that self-government would not descend upon them as a gift of the British'and further that 'meanwhile, they had a fairly clear idea of what was meant by self-government'. (Source: *Ibid.* p.74)

Gokhale in fact had remarked at the time:

'The political philosophy and axioms of the West have become an essential part of Indian life, and when its education came to India it brought with it the politics of Nationality, Liberalism and Freedom'. (Source: *Ibid.* Quoted in p. 74) He also had come out with a scheme post the discontentment (or lack of complete contentment rather) flowing from the changes made by the Minto-Morley Reforms. Other schemes and reforms were also proposed which all added up to make the political atmosphere rather tense particularly because the First World War had broken out and Indian soldiers and the general public were being called upon to help fight for the empire. Responding to the rising clamour for real and satisfactory reforms Montagu, the Secretary of State, made the following announcement in the House of Lords:

'The policy of his Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire'. (Source: *Ibid.* Quoted in p. 75)

After this announcement Montagu visited India and along with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, toured all over the country studying the Indian political problem. They then submitted what is

known as the 'Montford Report' based on which a Bill was passed by both the houses of the British Parliament and which became known as the Government of India Act, 1919.

Pylee explains the basic scheme of the Act embodied four general principles:

- (a) Complete popular control, as far as possible, in the field of Local Government
- (b) The Provincial Governments to be in large measure independent of the Government of India and to be responsible in some measure to popular representatives
- (c) The Government of India to remain responsible to Parliament and yet the Indian Legislative Council to be enlarged and popular representation and influence in it to be enhanced
- (d) The control of Parliament and the Secretary of State over the Government of India and the Provinces to be relaxed in proportion to the above changes. (Source: *Ibid.* p. 75)

The British by responding to the demands again and again in this careful fashion by coming up with a new act and constitutional scheme every few years, it seems to this author, set a precedent (of democratic approaches and federalism) which helped both the concepts gather further roots in India. The whole idea of a division of powers and responsibilities between the Centre and the Provinces which became easily and commonly accepted later in the Constituent Assembly, had its roots perhaps in the schemes of the British over decades which found expression in their acts of parliament like the Act of 1919. For all its heralding of progressive notions and concepts though, in practice the act of 1919 was found wanting and uninspiring. It seemed like some sort of a 'half was house between autocracy and responsible government'. (Source: *Ibid.* p. 75) In practice it became obvious gradually that the Act allowed very little by way of transfer of power to representatives of the people. Pylee comments on this phase as follows:

'Even those optimists, like the Indian liberals, who gave it a fair trial, found it wanting in many respects and were therefore terribly disappointed. That result was the emergence of a new spirit, a new unity and a new movement of the educated classes under the banner of the Indian National Congress. Mahatma Gandhi led the movement. He called it a 'non-violent, non-cooperation movement'. Soon, it gathered momentum and assumed the shape of a full-fledged agitation for complete transfer of power to Indian hands. Everyone felt the need of a Constitution, which would suit the conditions existing in India. The only difference of opinion was as to the nature of the Constitution, particularly whether it should be federal or unitary in character. Thus, for the first time in history of India, the possibility and the feasibility of an All India Federation became the most important subject for discussion among Indian and British political leaders.' (Source: *Ibid.* p. 89)

Since the dissatisfaction remained in the Indian populace and the clamour for a fully responsible government kept on rising the British government could not rest even after the Act of 1919. Also leaders like Gandhi had acquired huge stature by now and were persistently asking for a constitutional and responsible self-government elected by the people. Gandhi declared in 1922, that Swaraj would not be the writ of the British Parliament, but must spring from 'the wishes of the people of India as expressed through their freely chosen representatives'. Swaraj to Gandhi and others meant more than mere political freedom from London or representatives appointed by London. The word had come to acquire a mythology all of its own by now and meant a sort of self-governing self-realisation both nationally and personally for each individual Indian and a throwing away of both foreign ways and foreign rule. It is interesting to point out that this was essentially the appeal of Gandhi to the common man of India as opposed to that of leaders like Nehru or Patel, who were all, very much for the adoption or continuation rather of Western ways in all aspects of political, economic and social life.

The British government announced the appointment of the Simon Commission to enquire into whether and to what extent the principle of responsible government may be introduced but because it had no Indians on it more or less everybody decided to boycott it including the Indian National Congress. Instead a committee of all parties known popularly as the Nehru committee under the leadership of Motilal Nehru submitted a report which recommended for the first time the creation of a federation, as a 'constitutional remedy to drive out the twin evils of autocracy and compartmental-ism from Indian political life' and also recommended a complete transfer of power on the basis of such a federation, to the Indian people. Indian nationalist opinion was gathering strength by the day and was quoting the English philosopher James Stuart Mill back to the British again and again who has said that 'the government of one people by another has no meaning and no reality except as the governing people treat the governed as a human cattle farm'.

The British came up with an answer to this, for whatever reasons, which ultimately found acceptance from all interests and political parties. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, in 1929, declared that it was the intention of the British Government to grant India the status of a Dominion and to seek the concurrence of all sections of opinion in India to remove the distrust between the Great Britain and India. All Indian parties responded to the declaration positively and assured full cooperation. The *First Round Table Conference* was announced to take the matter forward but when during a debate in the House of Commons, the Conservative and even some Liberals were found to be against the idea of giving a Dominion Status to India, the idea was dropped. This angered the Congress who passed a resolution in 1930 going further ahead from the dominion demand and asking for full independence. Ultimately only the Princes and the representatives of the Indian Liberal party attended and while the British professed many intentions nothing came out of the whole exercise in the end.

Lord Irwin was keen to create an atmosphere of cordiality and as a gesture ordered the release of Gandhi who on his part withdrew the Civil Disobedience Movement and after prolonged negotiations entered into a pact known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact on the basis of which Gandhi agreed to attend a *Second Round Table Conference* as the representative of the Congress. The fact that the Congress would be represented obviously granted huge relevance to the conference. Meanwhile the Labour Government in England had lost and there was a new government which was a Coalition Government dominated by the Conservatives who were of course totally against any level of Indian independence. At the start of the conference itself, Sir Samuel Hoare, the chief spokesman of the British Government, declared that the conference was not a Constituent Assembly, the tone of which was shocking and surprising to Indians. The British Government reiterated that they would be agreeable to move toward a federation but Gandhi stubbornly stuck to his demand for *Purna Swaraj*. The conference failed but it did appoint a committee to arrive at agreements on communal and other outstanding issues. But this committee could not recommend any solutions and hence the British called another conference 'for a final review of the whole scheme'. The Indian National Conference and the Labour Party of Britain abstained from participation.

Meanwhile the so called 'Communal Award' came. This award also known as the Ramsay MacDonald Award came on the 4th of August, 1932 and created separate electorates on religious or communal basis, fixing the number of seat in the legislature for Muslims, Anglo-Indians, Indian Christians, Sikhs, Europeans, etc. But the part of it that provoked Gandhi to go into a fast unto death was the creation of separate electoral seats for the 'Depressed Classes or the

Scheduled Castes'. A compromise was struck known as the Poona Pact and Gandhi was persuaded to give up his fast. So the conference went ahead and at the end a new series of constitutional reforms were proposed with the objective of creating an All India Federation.

The final proposals that the British government made in 1933 in a White Paper were based on three principles for the proposed constitutional set up – federation, provincial autonomy and special responsibilities and safeguards vested in the Executive both at the centre and the Provinces. But this document did not satisfy Indian parties and so another committee went into the matter under the chairmanship of Marquess of Linlithgow. The proposals of this committee came in 1934, and recommended that a federation should be formed when fifty percent of the Princes joined the scheme. They recommended full responsible government in all the eleven British Indian Provinces. On the basis of this report the famous Government of India Act of 1935 was passed. The Bill was the longest ever passed by the British Parliament and had 451 clauses with fifteen schedules.

The Government of India was not accepted well by most parties because it was felt it was attempting too much where the circumstances were not there and also because the act granted very little real political power to Indians who had been demanding all along nothing short of full dominion status. As Pylee says, "to them the Bill constituted a gigantic facade without anything substantial within it". (Source: *Ibid.* p. 91)

The Government of India Act of 1935 was very complex and cumbersome and attempted to bind in a federal set up some 600 Princely States and 11 Provinces. But in the attempt to fulfil the demands of such a diverse array of interests some of the 'principles of a good federal system had to be abandoned'. (Source: *ibid.*) The Act wanted to first break up the Government into autonomous provinces and then unite them together in a federal set up which would include the princely states and while the Act had the powers to compulsorily bring all Provinces into the federation, it was powerless to bind the Princely States. And the notion of a document of 'Instrument of Accession' that was created to bring in the Princely States was not uniform for everybody with the result that there could emerge a diverse array of 'federal compacts' as Pylee puts it with the different states. Thus while India was to be a federation, the federal government wouldn't have an identical range of powers with all the constituent units and certainly rather different sets of powers with the provinces and the states. Also the government at the centre was not a fully 'responsible government' to the Indian people at the end of the day – a longstanding demand of the Indian people. The Governor-General was responsible not to anybody in India but to the British Crown and reported to the Secretary of State for India. Important activities like defence and external affairs were under the control of the Governor general and even if he acted in a manner that was not liked by the members of the federal legislature there was nothing they could do either to stop him or review his actions. The federal legislature itself couldn't ever be fully democratic under the Act of 1935 because while the Provinces were to elect representatives, the Princely state's representatives were to be nominated by the ruling maharajas or princes. Also the number of representatives of the princely states was more than in proportion to what they should have had on the basis of their population. The Governor General also had vast powers of intervention in the affairs of the Provinces, which thus diluted the federal nature of the set up.

There was however one feature which was of great significance. The clear and exhaustive separation of legislative powers into three elaborate lists – the Central List, the Provincial List and the Concurrent List – was attempted for the first time under any federal system anywhere in

the world. Later this made the job easy for the Constituent Assembly after independence, as far as the division of legislative powers between the centre and states were concerned. The Residuary Legislative Power for the provinces however, the power to legislate on a matter not on either the Central or Provincial List was left with the Governor General who could at his discretion empower either the Federal or the Provincial Legislatures to enact a law. In the case of the Princely States, the power was vested in the Princes. Generally, the Centre had more administrative powers over the Provinces than over the States, according to the Act. For instance, the federal laws were administered in the provinces by the federal officials and the Governors in the provinces were under the Governor General, but in the Princely States the administration of federal laws was by the Princely Rulers themselves. Summing up the effect of the Government of India Act of 1935, Pylee says:

"The Constitution Act of 1935 did not evoke any enthusiasm either in Britain or in India. In Britain, a powerful section of the Conservatives thought that too much power was being given to Indians, while many in the Labour party thought that the Act did not go far enough to satisfy Indian demands. Churchill, who was a vigorous critic of the Act, denounced it as 'voluminous but not luminous' and 'a work of pigmies'. In India every party except the Liberals and the Hindu Mahasabha, was emphatic in condemning the Act. The Indian Princes quietly backed out of the federal scheme and, as a result, the All India Federation soon became a lost ideal. Nevertheless, the relationship between the centre and the provinces came to be regulated in accordance with the federal provisions of the Constitution which came into operation in 1937." (Source: *ibid.* p. 101) And perhaps that was among the most lasting benefits of the Act of 1935 – it created and put into operation, albeit imperfectly, a constitutional framework for a federal relationship between the Centre and the Provinces/States.

A word is due on provincial autonomy flowing from the Act of 1935 in practice. Most of the provinces had Congress ministries elected to office excepting Punjab where there was a coalition government and in Bengal where the ministry was headed by the KrishakPraja Party, headed by A.K. FazlulHuq. On the functioning of the governments in the provinces, particularly in those ruled by the Indian National Congress which was supposedly in logger heads with the British led by Nehru and Gandhi perpetually, Pylee says: "Contrary to general expectations, the congress ministries in all the Provinces functioned in a remarkably effective manner.....although there were minor clashes between the Ministries and the Governors, by and large, Indian statesmanship and accommodation found in the British Governors willing partners of a commendable enterprise of laying down the firm foundations of a real parliamentary government in India.....it was a pity that the system could not work for a longer period on account of the serious differences of opinion between the congress and the British Government in the wake of the Second World War.....yet, during the short period of two years, the experiment proved the value of provincial autonomy if it was allowed to function properly." (Source: *ibid.* p. 116)

Apart from the establishment of the concept of provincial autonomy, there were other significant developments as well. For the first time, Indians were forming and running councils of ministers to run governments on the principle of joint responsibility of the cabinet. The leader of the party which commanded a stable majority in the Legislature was invited by the Governor to seek advice in the formation of the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) and the Ministers were appointed on his advice. In fact, the terms Prime Minister and Cabinet were used for the first time in 1937 and the public began to understand the significance of the terms very rapidly. The superiority of the Prime Minister over his colleagues was also recognised for instance in the higher salary that was given to him.

Another major aspect was the functioning of the Governors. There were almost no occasions of dispute between the Governor and the council of Ministers. When there were fundamental differences between the Governor and the Ministry, the latter voluntarily submitted its resignation when it found that the collaboration was no more possible, thereby ensuring that the tenure of the ministries were based on the confidence of the legislatures rather than at the pleasure of the Governors. The Governor had special powers to stop legislations if he so wished, but he never did so. Hence, in effect the legislatures in the provinces got the chance for the first time to function as real legislative bodies. Pylee says, indeed the most "striking feature of the working of provincial autonomy during this period was the behaviour of the Governors who functioned as constitutional heads of state" and....."thus there was 'substance of independence' in the provincial field and the two cardinal principles of a parliamentary government, representative character and the executive's responsibility to the legislature, were for the first time found in practice". (Source: *Ibid.* p. 117)

The progressive evolution of constitutional parliamentary democracy and federalism was however brought to a halt with the Second World War. The British anticipating war and its requirements of mobilisation of resources and people, had amended the Government of India Act of 1935 to enable the central government to co-ordinate the activities of the Central and Provincial governments. The Congress protested against this amendment of the Act which they said 'aimed to strike at the very root of provincial autonomy and render it a farce in case of War, which in effect could create a War dictatorship of the Central Government in India and which could make Provincial Governments the helpless agents of imperialism'. Later when the Governor General, Lord Linlithgow automatically declared war on Germany following the declaration by Britain, the Congress felt they were right in their apprehensions about the amendments, particularly since Lord Linlithgow's declaration was made without any consultation whatsoever with the political forces representing Indian public opinion. Soon after the declaration of war, the Viceroy started negotiations with the Congress, Muslim League and the Princes with to request their co-operation in the war effort. The Congress after a meeting of the working committee agreed to support the war effort after offering sympathy to the democracies that were facing German aggression.

QUESTIONS

1. When and why did the British introduce population census in India?
2. Write an essay on the constitutional developments between 1858 and 1935.

SUGGESTED READING

M.V. Pylee, *Constitutional Government in India*

SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVES

Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The Revolutionary Extremists
- The Congress Socialists
- The Communists

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the economic structure of Indian had transformed. The self-contained village economy, which was also self-sustaining in many ways and had been there for thousands of years, was giving way under the crushing weight of the colonial system of taxation (of agriculture). Naturally there was an exodus from the villages to the towns in search of jobs in the new centres of industrial production set up initially by the British capitalists and later by the Indian trader turned capitalist. Also village and town handicrafts had come under huge strain both due to competition from factory made goods and also because of a severe decline in the main class of patrons the craftsmen depended upon. In the case of town handicrafts, the consuming class being feudal lords, kings and princes and also a section of rich merchants, financiers and indigenous bankers. The ruined and declining craftsmen either chose to become poor landless agricultural labourers serving *zamindars* or joined the exodus of the poor and the hungry and the dispossessed moving to cities in search of factory jobs. As may be imagined both due to the abundant supply of desperate hungry workers and the axiom of profit maximisation or greed that capitalist enterprises operate under, there eventually came to be unimaginable and unprecedented exploitation of this new class of proletariat industrial workers. There were no political forces voicing the interests of or representing this class at first, nor were there laws as yet to protect their most basic rights and to prevent their extreme and utterly inhuman exploitation. It was a matter of time before they would rise up for themselves and would come to be excellently guided and led by some devoted individuals from the educated middle and upper classes, who came to imbibe Marxist and leftist ideology in the course of their own intellectual journeys.

So the exploited peasant of the village living in some instances in slave like conditions under all powerful *zamindars* and the industrial workers in the urban manufacturing centres living in utter poverty and squalor came to constitute the new class of India's proletariat.

It is instructive to have a more detailed and vivid idea of exactly how full of misery the life of an industrial worker and his family was in those days. A.A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth, representatives of the British Trade Union Congress had visited India to study the conditions of the working class and were shocked at the conditions. They reported for instance that '...enquiries go to show that the vast majority of workers in India do not receive more than about one shilling per day' and gave the following account of the living conditions:

'...We visited the workers quarters wherever we stayed and had we not seen them we could not have believed that such evil places existed.....Here is a group of houses in 'lines', the owner of which charges the tenant of each dwelling 4 shilling 6 dimes a month as rent. Each house, consisting of one dark room used for all purposes, living, cooking and sleeping, is 9 feet by 9 feet, with mud walls and loose tiled roof, and has a small open compound in front, a corner of

which is used as a latrine. There is no ventilation in the living room except by a broken roof or that obtained through the entrance door when open. Outside the dwelling is a long narrow channel which receives the waste matter of all descriptions and where flies and other insects abound....Outside all the houses on the edge of each side of the strip of land between the 'lines' are the exposed gulleys, at some places stopped up with garbage, refuse and other waste matter, giving forth horrible smells repellent in the extreme. It is obvious that these gulleys are often used as conveniences, especially by children....The overcrowding and in sanitary conditions almost everywhere prevailing demonstrate the callousness and wanton neglect of their obvious duties by the authorities concerned.' (A.A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth, 'Report on Labour Conditions in India', Trade Union Congress, United Kingdom of Britain, 1928, p. 10 (quoted in R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p.387-88)

The above description is confirmed by Indian observers as well as follows:

'Nothing can equal, for squalor and filth and stench, the *bustee* (worker's quarters) in Howrah and the suburbs north of Calcutta.....The great majority of the workers in the jute mills are compelled to live in private *bustees*. Under the Bengal Municipalities Act the duty of improving the slum areas is cast on the owners who make very handsome incomes from the poor occupants. But vested interests see to it that these *bustees* – 'filthy disease ridden hovels'. As they have been called, with no windows, chimneys or fireplaces, and the doorways so low that one has to bend almost on one's knees to enter. There is neither light nor water supply, and of course no sanitary arrangements. Access to groups of *bustees* is usually along a narrow tunnel of filth, breeding almost throughout the year, but particularly during the rains, myriads of mosquitoes and flies.....' (Source: Shiva Rao, 'The Industrial Worker in India', pp. 113-14)

Workers were usually not paid enough to begin with and even the inflation in basic food stuffs was never matched with wage increases resulting in near starvation conditions. Between 1914 and 1918 in Bombay, there was an increase of nearly 80-100% rise in food grain prices whereas in a large mill like C.N. Wadia's Century Mills for instance there was only a counter balancing wage increase of 15%. The mill owners though, the C.N. Wadia group, earned a fantastic profit of Rs. 22.5 lakhs in 1918 on an invested capital of as low as Rs.20 lakh only. There was a huge labour movement through out the first decades of the new century but the plight of industrial workers and their exploitation never really abated. In 1938, S.V. Parulekar, the Indian delegate at the International Labour Conference reported to the conference:

'In India the vast majority of workers get a wage which is not enough to provide them with the meanest necessity of life. The report of an enquiry into the working class budgets in Bombay by Mr. Findlay Shirras in 1921 states that the industrial worker consumes the maximum cereals allowed by the Famine Code but less than the diet issued to criminals in jail under the Bombay Prisons Code. The conditions have deteriorated since the publication of that report, as the earnings are lower today than what they were in 1921.

The wage census carried out by the Bombay Government in 1935 reveals the fact that in cotton textiles, which is one of the premier and most organised industries, the *monthly* earnings of 18 per cent of the workers in Gokak were between 3 shilling and 9 shilling, of 32 per cent of the workers in Sholapur between 7 shilling 6 dimes and 15 shillings and of 20 per cent of the workers below 22 shilling 6 dimes and 30 shilling in the city of Bombay.

The level of wages in unorganised industries, whose number is very large in India, can better be imagined than described. Taking advantage of the class of expropriated peasants which is incessantly increasing by leaps and bounds, the employers have driven the wage far below the

subsistence level and do not allow it to rise to a point which the conditions of industry can permit....

The workers of India are unprotected against risks of sickness, unemployment, old age and death.....The Government of India have consistently refused to devise any scheme of benefits for the unemployed.....Suicides by workers to protect themselves against unemployment are in evidence and deaths due to hunger are recorded in the municipal reports for the city of Bombay.' (Source: S.V. Parulekar, Indian Worker's Delegate, International Labour Conference, Geneva, July, 1938 (quoted in R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, pp.388-89))

The low wages and unimaginable living conditions of the workers enabled the capitalists whether British or foreign to pile up huge profits which were often many times the invested capital even. It was inevitable that people living in such conditions would rise and revolt. As R.P. Dutt puts it:

'This is the background of the Indian Labour Movement. It is to the millions living in these conditions that Socialism and Trade Union have brought for the power of combination, and the first vision of a goal which can end their misery.' (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 402)

It is not clear when exactly strikes began as a form of protest but there is record of a strike in 1877 at the Empress Mills at Nagpur over wage rates. In the period 1882 and 1890 there were twenty-five strikes in the Bombay and Madras presidencies.

There was a meeting of Bombay mill workers in 1884 called by a local journalist and editor, N.M. Lokhande, who drew up a list of demands for limitation of hours of work, a weekly rest day, a noontime recess and compensation for injuries, to present to the Factories Commission as the demands of the Bombay workers. Lokhande started calling his organisation of workers the 'Bombay Millhands Association' and called himself the President. He also started a journal *Dinabandhu* or *Friend of the Poor*. Lokhande was an educated intellectual of sorts and was a great philanthropic promoter of the causes of labourers but his organisation was not really a trade union. It had no membership, no funds and no rules. He basically acted as a well meaning advisor to workers who came to him with their problems. He had also once served in the government's Factories Commission.

Even though there was no organised trade union as such, there continued throughout workers spontaneous agitations every now and then. There was a strike in the famous Budge Budge Jute Mills in 1895 and also a strike by workers in Ahmedabad textile industry. The level of gradual worker consolidation can be judged from the following account of the situation:

'Despite almost universal testimony before Commissions between 1880 and 1908 to the effect that there were no actual unions, many stated that the labourers in an individual mill were often able to act in unison and that, as a group, they were very independent. The inspector of boilers spoke in 1892 of 'an unnamed and unwritten bond of union among the workers peculiar to the people': and the Collector of Bombay wrote that although this was little more than in the air' it was 'powerful'. 'I believe' he wrote to the Government, 'it has had much to do with the prolonged maintenance of what seems to be a monopoly or almost a monopoly wage.' Sir David Sassoon said in 1908 that if labour 'had no proper organisation, they had an understanding among themselves'. Mr. Barucha, lately Director of Industries in Bombay Presidency, stated that 'the mill hands were all powerful against the owners, and could combine, though they had not got a trade union' (R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, pp. 403-4 (quoted in))

So R.P. Dutt concludes although 'there was not yet any organisation, it would be a mistake to under estimate the growth of solidarity in action and elementary class-consciousness of the Indian industrial workers during the decades preceding 1914'. (Source: *ibid.* p.401)

From 1905 onwards an interesting thing began to happen by way of a huge advance of worker mobilisation. The national movement, which was coming under the influence of the extremists and as a consequence becoming a lot more militant, found in the working class a huge usable pool of willing and courageous agitators. The Swadeshi leaders realised the power of organising labour into a movement, which could then advance the cause of the freedom struggle. So they showed great enthusiasm in organising stable trade unions or trade union like groups, strikes, legal aid to workers and fund collection drives. Public meetings were organised in support of striking workers and were addressed by leaders of the stature of B.C. Pal, C.R. Das and Liaquat Hussain. The most energetic of the Swadeshi leaders working for the rights of workers and involved in supporting them were Ashwinicoomar Banerji, Prabhat Kumar Roy Chowdhuri, Premtosh Bose and Apurba Kumar Ghose. They were very successful in organising workers in the Government Press, Railways and the jute industry – all areas were either foreign capitalists or the government rather than Indian capitalists were the controlling/owning authorities.

How much the labour movement and the national movement had converged can be gauged from for instance the hugely successful six-day political strike populated mainly by the industrial working class in 1908 against Tilak's imprisonment. Yet workers were too uneducated and mired in poverty and illiteracy to be able to organise themselves into trade unions but fortunately every now and then and here and there throughout the length and breadth of the country philanthropic individuals kept coming forward to lend a helping hand to the workers. In 1910 for instance, a 'Kamgar Hitavardhak Sabha' was formed by some well meaning social workers and philanthropists in Bombay to aid workers.

Here it is important to remember the developments in the Congress. The Indian National Congress split in 1907 and almost at the same time revolutionary terrorism or extremism made its appearance particularly in Bengal and the two developments were connected. The failure of the Moderates had become apparent by now because they had failed to work with and take the common mass of people with them. Also their attempts were rebuffed by the British with contempt and the nationalists were branded 'disloyal babus', 'seditious brahmins' and 'violent villains' etc. The path was set towards extremism by leaders like Tilak and Aurobindo Ghosh who were not ready to show patience for the foolish ineffective methods of the moderates. There was a fierce confrontation between the Extremists and the Moderates in the Congress session held in December, 1907 with the two sides coming to blows and abuses with shows thrown at respected leader. This internecine warfare within the Congress had the effect of declining the national movement in general. That set the stage of the rise of the revolutionary terrorists or extremists. As Bipan Chandra puts it: 'The end of 1907 brought another political trend to the fore. The impatient young men of Bengal took to the path of individual heroism and revolutionary terrorism (a term we use without any pejorative meaning and for want of a different term). This was primarily because they could find no other way of expressing their patriotism.' Further the extremists had pointed out the failures of the Moderates but could not themselves lead an effective agitation. So Bipan Chandra comments: 'Unsurprisingly, the Extremists waffling failed to impress the youth who decided to take recourse to physical force. The *Yugantar*, a newspaper echoing this feeling of disaffection, wrote in April, 1906, after the police assault on the peaceful Barisal Conference: 'The thirty crores of people inhabiting India

must raise their sixty crores of hands to stop this curse of oppression. Force must be stopped by force'. (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*, p. 143)

The early beginnings of revolutionary terrorism along with Congress-Muslim League unity and the first demands of immediate self-government also aided the growth of the mass movements. The years of the First World War and the immediate post war years including the years following the communist revolution in Russia were to prove the most eventful in the advance of the trade union movement. The reasons were both economic and political for this spurt in activity. Economically, in conditions of a constant increase (even doubling) in the prices of essentials without a corresponding increase in the wages on the one hand there was fantastic profiteering by the capitalists, both foreign and Indian on the other. All of this enabled a wave of revolutionary militant fervour.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and its implications as it dawned on the intelligentsia leading the labour class and the workers themselves created a surge of enthusiasm and hope. The hope was that if common people in Russia – workers, peasants and the intelligentsia – could unite and overthrow the mighty Czarist empire and establish a social order where there was no exploitation of one human being by another, then perhaps the Indian people could also do so. Socialist doctrines, particularly Marxism, the guiding theory of the Bolshevik Party, acquired a sudden attraction. B.C. Pal, the extremist leader wrote in 1919 that '...after the downfall of the Czar, there has grown up all over the world a new power, the power of the people determined to rescue their legitimate rights – the right to live freely and happily without being exploited and victimised by the wealthier and the so called higher classes'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *'India's struggle for Independence'*, Penguin Books, 1989, p.297)

The revolutionary terrorists relied on assassinations and hit and run methods. They attracted the attention of the general public with their heroisms but no mass movement got triggered. Bipan Chandra has commented: 'Revolutionary terrorism gradually petered out. Lacking a mass base, despite remarkable heroism, the individual revolutionaries, organised in small secret groups, could not withstand suppression by the still strong colonial state. But despite their small numbers and eventual failure, they made a valuable contribution to the growth of nationalism in India. As a historian has put it, 'they gave us back the pride of our manhood'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *'India's struggle for Independence'*, Penguin Books, 1989, p.145)

A huge strike wave started in 1918, which swept the country throughout 1919 and 1920. There were massive and repeated strikes by workers in all the industrial centres – Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Madras etc and both workers of government facilities and industries owned by capitalists saw strike action. A strike that started in the Bombay cotton mills towards the end of 1918 saw by the January 1919, 125000 workers participating in it and gradually all the workers of the industry joined the strike. It was in the response of the working class to the agitation against the Rowlatt Act which demonstrated the political role of the workers in the national struggle very prominently. In the first six months of 1920, there were 200 strikes involving 15 lakh workers.

In 1918, the first organised Indian trade union with membership lists and subscriptions, the Madras Labour Union, was started by two young men, G. Ramanajulu Naidu and G. ChelvapathiChetti, connected with Annie Besant's movement in Madras and was presided over by B.P. Wadia, Besant's colleague. There were 125 unions with a membership 250000 by 1920. Even though the emergence of a trade union movement was the best thing that could have

happened to the cause of the Indian working class for the times, there were nevertheless some deficiencies in terms of ideology and character. R. P. Dutt comments on it as follows:

'Unions were formed by the score during this period. Many were essentially strike committees, springing up in the conditions of an immediate struggle, but without staying power. While the workers were ready for struggle the facilities for office organisation were inevitably in other hands. Hence there arose the contradictions of the early Indian labour movement. There was not yet any political movement on the basis of socialism, of the conceptions of the working class and the class struggle. In consequence, the so-called "outsiders" or helpers from other class elements who came forward, for varying reasons, to give their assistance in the work of organisation, and whose assistance was in fact indispensable in this initial period, came without understanding of the aims and needs of the labour movement, and brought with them the conceptions of middle class politics. Whether their aims were philanthropic, as in some cases, careerist, as in others, or actuated by devotion to the national political struggle, as in others, they brought with them an alien outlook, and were incapable of guiding the young working class movement on the basis of the class struggle which the workers were in fact waging. This misfortune long dogged the Indian labour movement, seriously hampering the splendid militancy and heroism of the workers: and its influence still remains.' (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 406)

In 1920 the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was founded as a sort of federation of Indian trade unions. The inaugural session was held in Bombay in 1920 and the extremist leader Lajpat Rai became the President and Joseph Baptista the Vice President. The immediate impetus for starting the congress may have been to nominate a representative for the International Labour Congress at Geneva. The founders of the Congress were motivated by the Washington Labour Conference and had felt that it would be helpful to develop a unified voice of the labour movement not only in India but also worldwide. The other aims were undertaking welfare measures, lobbying for legislation for workers with the imperial British government, moral and social improvement of workers and in the whole working without provoking class conflict which many of the leaders felt would at that juncture weaken the national movement. Gandhi, possibly anxious that a class conflict would break out between the exploited working class and the capitalist class, whether Indian or British, had gone so far as to start his own trade union movement, the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association in 1918 with a separatist slant from the movements in the rest of the country. He propounded his 'Trusteeship' principle and declared that owners and capitalists should behave like trustees or philanthropic managers of the industries they control. That the interests of the capitalists and the workers were directly against each other's was something he wished to be brushed aside and instead wanted everybody to perform and function at high moral level of character and generosity to which he himself could have and did confirm. The Marxist view of Gandhi's position is that it was essentially *de facto* class collaborationist and against the interests of the workers as the capitalist with his axiomatic focus on profits could never be a trustee of worker's interests. He was being asked to perform a contradictory set of roles thereby. To be fair to Gandhi, he did ask the workers to perform *Satyagraha* and assert their rights if the owners did not take care of them but on the whole his approach had a 'restraining role' against the pressure for militancy which was coming 'from below' as Sumit Sarkar puts it. (Source: Sumit Sarkar, 'Modern India', Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p.176)

He comments thus: 'In general, however, as in Bombay in January 1919, the pressure for militancy came from below rather than from these early unions which played a restraining role. The early middle-class union leaders were at best inspired by nationalism, but often were quite loyalist in their politics, like N.M. Joshi in Bombay or K.C. Roychaudhuri in Calcutta. The

restraining role was most unequivocal in the Gandhian Textile Labour Association (MajoorMahajan) of Ahmedabad, but Wadia, too, opposed a strike in Binny's in July 1918 on the ground that soldiers (fighting for the British) needed uniforms'. (Source: *ibid.*) He further points out as follows how strikes were not the only form of protest of the rising exploited militant industrial working class:

'Strikes were only one form of expression of acute popular distress and discontent caused by factors like prices, a poor harvest and scarcity conditions over much of the country in 1918-1919, the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, and artisan unemployment (handloom cotton production.....touched an all time low in 1919-20). A more elemental form was that of food riots; the looting of small-town markets and city grain shops. And the seizure of debt-bonds. 115 grain shops were looted in the Bombay mill area in the food riots of early 1918, while the account books of Marwaris were seized by railwaymen. There were food riots in the Krishna-Godavari delta region in May 1918, followed by three days of intensive riots in Madras city in September in which textile and railway workers played an important part. In Bengal 38 *hat* looting cases with 859 convictions were reported from Noakhali, Chittagong, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Khulna, 24 Parganas and Jessore districts in 1919-20'.

Upto 1927, says R.P. Dutt, the AITUC had a very limited practical connection with the working class struggle, but a new dawn started to break from this time onwards for the workers movement. (R.P. Dutt, '*India Today*', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 409) This happened with the rise of the left in Indian politics and the communist movement and the new left turn that a new generation of leaders began to give to the national movement particularly within the Congress.

All along, with the rise of the working class in the urban industrial centres there was also a growth of organisations of poor peasants who rose in spontaneous revolt against exploitation gradually over time helped and aided by the middle class leadership intelligentsia of the national movement. The most important peasant struggles happened in the second and third decade of the century. The *Kisan Sabha* and *Eka* movements in Avadh in U.P., the Mappila rebellion in Malabar and the *Bardoli Satyagrahai* in Gujrat. The movement in Avadh and Pratapgarh that Baba Ram Chandra later came to be known as the *Eka* movement or unity movement after the alliance of Congress and League and the Khilafat agitation when Congress and Khilafat leaders joined the movement of farmers and gave it a huge thrust. Another movement which also helped organise the rural proletariat was the *Bardoli Satyagraha* which made VallabhBhai Patel famous. This movement united the whole nation and became part of the national movement. It was also the first instance of Gandhian methods succeeding.

The British had been watching with increasing alarm the organised rise of the industrial and peasant working classes in the first decades of the new century but after the 1917 Russian Revolution they were almost in panic that this movement would soon come under the influence and control of communists who just about also appearing on the Indian scene. One British government report from this time refers to the need to direct the movement into "safe" channels and the "right type" of trade unionism. This was also the reason why the British government enacted the Trade union Act, 1926 legislation with its special emphasis on restricting political activities. The government was in general all the time on the look because they did not want a political working class awakening. They feared such an awakening could mean that they would be co-opted in the national movement of the Congress thereby granting it a strength it did not have or even more dangerously they would come under the influence of the communists.

But despite all obstacles and confusions, the beginnings of a working class political awakening werestarted and socialist and communist ideas slowly started reaching Indian shores. British officials at first tried to pretend that communism in India would be nothing more than a conspiracy hatched from Moscow but as SumitSarkar puts it:

‘....Indian Communism really sprang....from roots within the national movement itself, as disillusioned revolutionaries, Non-Cooperators, Khilafatists, and labour and peasant activists sought new roads to political and social emancipation’.

M. N. Roy (whose real name was Naren Bhattacharya) was probably India's first communist. He attended the second Congress of the Communist International in 1919. Here however he had a major disagreement with Lenin regarding the strategy that communists should adopt in colonial countries like India. Lenin believed that the communists should lie low in countries like India at first and join the mainstream national movements, like that of the Congress under the leadership of charismatic leaders like Gandhi. M.N. Roy argued that people in India were already disillusioned with bourgeois-nationalist leaders like Gandhi and were ‘moving towards revolution independently of the bourgeois-nationalist movement’. This difference on approach among communists would later become an even bigger issue and would become the cause of the divisions and factionalisms which continues among Indian communists to this day. In October 1920, M.N. Roy, AbaniMukherji (who was a former revolutionary terrorist and had converted to communism) and some others formed the first Communist Party of India in October 1920. Some Khilafat workers and leaders like Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Shafiq also joined the party. He later shifted his headquarters to Berlin and started a fortnightly *Vanguard of Indian Independence* and also published a pioneering attempt at analysing Indian economy and society from a Marxist standpoint, *India in Transition*. There were also individuals and groups outside India who were veering towards Marxism. The individuals like VirendranathChattopadhyay, BhupendranathDutt and Barkatullah who had started the India independence Party also adopted a socialist approach and even tried to secure Soviet backing but the effort got scuttled by M.N. Roy who saw them as factionalist. Also by the middle of 1920, a section of the Ghadr Movement in exile under the influence of people like Rattan Singh, Santokh Singh and Teja Singh Swatantra had turned communist.

There had emerged many individuals and groups or factions over the period of the struggles of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements who had turned to communism being disappointed with those movements and the leadership of Gandhi. The most prominent of such leaders and individuals were S.A. Dange in Maharashtra (Bombay), Muzaffar Ahmed in Calcutta and Singaravelu in Madras and ghulamHussain in Lahore. By the end of 1922 through the help of NaliniGupta(who had been a revolutionary terrorist) and ShaukatUsmani (who had been a khilafat activist) M.N. Roy established contact with the communist activists. Abani Mukherjee who had fallen out with M.N. Roy also made similar attempts on behalf of the rival Chattopadhyay group. Left nationalist journals like *Atmashakti* and *Dhumketu* in Calcutta and *Navyug* in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh.appeared which started publishing articles explaining socialism and celebrating the leadership of Lenin in Russia. Even from time to time extracts were published from the communist journal *Vanguard*. From August 1922, Dange started bringing out the weekly *Socialist* from Bombay, the first communist journal to be published from India. Thus a loose coalition of communist groups in a sort of a distant contact with each other emerged along with M.N. Roy and his supporters.

Most of these communist groups came together in Kanpur in December, 1925 to form an all-India organisation under the name of the communist Party of India (CPI). At this stage the

strategy the communists adopted was two fold. One, to have a secret illegal organisation which will propagate the ideas of communism and the other to form a group within the Congress which will try to give the Congress a socialist direction. So the CPI called upon all its members to enrol themselves as members of the Congress. They were told to form a strong left wing within the Congress and all its organs and to try to transform the Congress into a radical mass-based organisation.

The communists adopted the strategy of organising workers and peasants groups all over the country and to work within the Congress using these groups. In 1928 all the provincial organisations or groups were organised into a Workers and Peasants Party (WPP) and all communists became members of this party. The purpose of the WPP was to work within the Congress and make it a 'party of the people' and also 'independently organise workers and peasants in class organisations in class organizations, to enable first the achievement of complete independence and ultimately of socialism'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, 'India's struggle for Independence', Penguin Books, 1989, p. 301) The WPPs expanded fast and soon within the Congress the communist influence became substantial. In addition to the effort of the communists there were also then young individual leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose who were advocating a socialist path vigorously. The youth of the Congress had turned on the whole leftist under the influence of these leaders and the WPPs. The WPPs also managed to make rapid progress in the trade union movement and thus gradually made great strides within the working class. The left gained prominence and consequently power within the Congress led national movement because by now the vast majority of the foot soldiers of the mass rallies and demonstrations were from the working classes and the majority of the working classes and trade unions were under the influence of socialist or communist leaders or groups.

The British government meanwhile had got very alarmed at the rising communist influence. In 1924 under a Labour Government in England, the famous Cawnpore Trial (the Kanpur Bolshevik Conspiracy Case) was staged and four communist leaders Dange, Shaikat Usmani, Muzaffar Ahmed and Nalini Gupta were tried and sentenced to four years imprisonment. This only served to make people of India even more aware of the communist cause and point of view and united the working classes of India in a strong bond.

1927 and 1928 were very good years for the communist movement as the left leaning leaders of the congress seemed to be holding the reigns of the movement with the huge mass backing of the working class participants particularly in the industrial centres. At the Delhi session of the Trade Union Congress in 1927, which was attended by the British communist M.P., Shapurji Saklatvala, a Parsi, the most militant voices in the working classes at the time emerged and seemed to be being heard more than ever before.

The rise of the working classes in 1927-28 was qualitatively different from earlier times. The Marxist historian R.P. Dutt comments on it as follows:

'1928 saw the greatest tide of working class advance and activity of any year of the post war period. The centre of this advance was in Bombay. For the first time a working class leadership had emerged, close to the workers in the factories, guided by the principles of the class struggle, and operating as a single force in the economic and political field. The response of the workers was overwhelming. The political strikes and demonstrations against the arrival of the Simon Commission in February placed the working class for the moment in the vanguard of the national struggle; for both the Congress leadership and the reformist trade-union leadership had frowned on the project and were startled by its success. Many of the Bombay municipal workers were

victimised and discharged for their participation; a further strike compelled their reinstatement'.
(Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 412)

There were massive strikes all over the country in 1928 and not just in Bombay. The number of strikes totalled more than the number of strikes in the previous five years together. The most dramatic strike action happened in Bombay's textile industry. The entire mill labour of 150000 struck work and stood united against every form of pressure and Government violence. The strike was originally directed against downsizing or job cuts and a wage reduction of 7.5%, but as the strike found success the demands were expanded. Initially the Congress supported reformist trade unions opposed the strike and N.M. Joshi described their position as that of "lookers on" but later as the strike became a roaring success they were forced to offer grudging support to it. The government adopted every method to break the will of the workers, but failed to break the strike. Finally it appointed the Fawcett Commission, which recommended the acceptance of the demand for withdrawal of the 7.5% wage cut and some other demands of the workers.

This and other successes under the leadership of the communists sent the British government almost into a panic. Lord Irwin in his speech to the Legislative Assembly in January, 1929 almost admitted the level of anxiety of the government when in his speech to the Legislative Assembly he said "the disquieting spread of communist doctrines has been causing anxiety" and declared his intension to clamp down on leftist forces. The press in England also took up the issue of communist influence and raised a hue and cry. The Indian national press of the reformist trade unions and many congress leaders joined in the outcry. The *Bombay Chronicle* reported in May 1929 that "for months past socialistic principles have been preached in India at various conferences, especially those of peasants and workers". These nationalist leaders were afraid that the ground was slipping from under their feet and they would lose control of the national movement.

In March 1929, the government arrested thirty two left and communist activists including three British Communists – Philip Spratt, Ben Bradley and Lester Hutchinson – who had come to India to help organise the trade union movement. The aim was to put the top leadership of the left out of action with the hope that that would take the trade union and national movements out of communist influence and give time to the reformists to reclaim their control. The thirty two accused were put up for trial at Meerut, in what came to be known as the famous Meerut Conspiracy Case. This case was to become a historic event in the history of India's left movement because it served to rivet the attention of the whole nation on the communist cause and gave communists a platform to state their ideology and beliefs. Many nationalist leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, M.A. Ansari, and M.C. Chagla came forward to join the defence team of lawyers defending the prisoners in court and even Gandhiji felt the need to visit the prisoners in jail. The speeches made by the prisoners during the trial were carried by the nationalist newspapers and thus a whole nation got a chance to become familiar with communist ideas. The opportunity that the communist leaders got can be gauged for instance from the following that one of the charged, GopenChakravarty, said as part of his statement in court:
"Emancipation of the Working class from the exploitation and oppression of capitalism being my aim it was my fundamental task to devote myself to the work of Trade Union organisations which were very weak and undeveloped at the time.

One of the basic principles of Trade Union movement is that it brings together all the wage earners in an industry and organises them on class basis. A Trade Union if it is to be a genuine

workers organisation must represent their economic class interests against the employers and capitalists as a class. A Trade Union must necessarily defeat its own end if it fails to teach the workers the basic principles of class consciousness and solidarity”.

In January 1933, after a long trial the leaders were given unbelievably harsh and extreme sentences. Muzaffar Ahmed was to be jailed for life, Dange, Ghate, Joglekar, Nimbkar and Spratt were sentenced for twelve years, Mirajkar, Bradley and Usmani were jailed for ten years and the lightest sentence that was awarded was for ten years of rigorous imprisonment. Later the international uproar and agitation that followed had succeeded in reducing some of the sentences.

The leftist unions had taken complete control of the national All India Trade Union Congress by the end of 1929 and as soon as this happened the reformist groups spilt the movement and walked out with their meagre following. Unfortunately the left themselves on the question of the most effective strategy for growth were not united and themselves split. The section that believed that the time had come for communists to go it alone and to strike it out as a distinct political identity and have a separate role for itself from the Congress, essentially the most ideologically purist communist section, formed the Red Trade Union Congress. A less extreme communist faction went another way and formed National Trade Union Federation. So the trade union movement in a way got split three ways.

The split at the party levels among the leftist forces was even more ugly and damaging. Bipan Chandra gives the following account of it and comments on it as follows:
‘As if the Government blow was not enough, the Communists inflicted a more deadly blow on themselves by taking a sudden lurch towards what is described in leftist terminology as sectarian politics or ‘leftist deviation’.

Guided by the resolutions of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, the Communists broke their connection with the National Congress and declared it to be a class party of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, the Congress and the bourgeoisie it supposedly represented were declared to have become supporters of imperialism. Congress plans to organise a mass movement around the slogan of *Purna Swaraj* were seen as sham efforts to gain influence over the masses by bourgeoisie leaders who were working for a compromise with British imperialism. Congress left leaders such as Nehru and Bose, were declared as agents of the bourgeoisie within the national movement’ who were out to ‘bamboozle the mass of workers and keep the masses under bourgeois influence. The Communists were now out to ‘expose’ all talk of non-violent struggle and advance the slogan of armed struggle against imperialism. In 1931, the Gandhi-Irwin Pact was described as a proof of the Congress betrayal of nationalism.

Finally, the Workers and Peasants Party was also dissolved on the ground that it was inadvisable to form a tow class (workers and peasants) party for it was likely to fall prey to prey bourgeoisie influences. The Communists were to concentrate, instead, on the formation of an ‘illegal, independent and centralized’ communist party. The result of this sudden shift in the Communists political position was their isolation from the national movement at the very moment when it was gearing up for its greatest mass struggle and conditions were ripe for massive growth in the influence of the Left over it. Further, the Communists split into several splinter groups. The Government took further advantage of this situation and, in 1934, declared the Communist Party of India (CPI) illegal’.(Source: Bipan Chandra and others, ‘India’s struggle for Independence’, Penguin Books, 1989, p. 302)

This did not end the left movement if that is what the imperial British government had hoped to achieve. Instead attracted by the strong radical stance of the CPI, the glorious example of the Soviet Union and being disappointed with the Gandhi led Civil Disobedience Movement, many young people and the former revolutionary terrorists who had turned into Marxists over the years joined the CPI. On the other hand within the Congress many people with a leftist orientation refused to leave the field to the right and the capitalists and quit the Civil Disobedience Movement. So they continue to struggle with their approach within the movement. Thus the left movement was saved.

(In 1934 a group of young left nationalist elements within the Congress had also formed the Congress Socialist Party to push for a leftist direction within the Congress but that will be discussed a little later.)

In 1935, the communist advance got a great leap forward when under the leadership of P.C. Joshi the Communist Party of India was reorganised. This was also facilitated by the direction of the decisions of the Seventh Congress of the Communist International meeting at Moscow in August 1935. The Communist International looking at the world faced with the threat of Fascism decided that the earlier position of going it alone needed to be changed and in all colonial capitalist countries the communists should attempt to forge a united front with all socialists and other anti-fascists and even with bourgeoisie led nationalist movements. So the Indian communists in line with this change in the thinking of the Communist International decided that they would once again try to infiltrate the Congress and change it from within along socialist lines. The document that laid out the theoretical basis for this appeared in early 1936 (as an article by R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley in the British Communist journal *Labour Monthly*) and was called the Dutt-Bradley Thesis which called for converting the Congress into an 'anti-imperialist people's front'. This paper also called for specific action to ensure that trade unions and peasant organisations be given collective affiliation of the Congress, elections to be contested on a radical programme, but for office entry to be repudiated, and the raising of a principal positive slogan that the Constituent Assembly should be elected by universal suffrage. Jawaharlal Nehru had already made such a demand in 1930 and Dutt and Bradley had met him in Lausanne shortly before they wrote their article. The party declared that under the circumstances that the Indian national movement was operating under, the National Congress could play 'a great part and a foremost part in the work of realizing the anti-imperialist people's front' and in 1938 went even further and declared that the Congress was 'the central mass political organisation of the Indian people ranged against imperialism'.

(Source: *Guidelines of the History of the Communist Party of India*, issued by the Central Party Education Department, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 46 and 54)

They had realised that for the moment the national movement was really the most important class struggle underway and if it wasn't it needed to be made into one by not leaving the capitalist bourgeoisie inside the Congress remaining unchallenged and with a free hand to do as it will. SumitSarkar says that apart from the change in line of the comintern, there were also internal pressures which aided this change 'for the aftermath of the Civil Disobedience Movement brought into the Communist movement a new generation of disillusioned Gandhian nationalists and revolutionary terrorists with much wider contacts with and prestige among the nationalist mainstream than the Bombay and Calcutta sects of the 1920s could have possibly enjoyed'. (Source: SumitSarkar, *'Modern India'*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 335)

The communists jumped into Congress work with great energy and many even managed to get nominated to district and provincial committees and almost twenty managed to reach the All

India Congress Committee. The communists also launched into peasant movements in Kerala, Andhra, Bengal and Punjab and were hugely successful. As a result of this new initiative the communists and other leftists regained their reputation of being the most militant anti-British and anti-imperialist fighters.

Even before the formal change of line under P.C. Joshi in 1935 there had been an undercurrent of moves from 1934 onwards towards unity among all the groups and individuals of a leftist persuasion particularly among communists. The communists and the followers of M.N. Roy who had earlier separated himself from the mainstream communist movement tried came together and tried to organise a general strike in textiles in 1934, and there were big strikes in Sholapur (February-May), Nagpur (May-July) and, a Bombay general strike from April. Apart from the reorganisation of industrial workers and trade union movements there was also a great advance in terms of organising and advancing peasant organisations, in many places for the first time. Sumit Sarkar offers the following detailed account of this great historically significant development as follows:

'The new spirit of unity among Left-Nationalists, Socialists and Communists found expression also through the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha during the Lucknow and Faizpur Congress sessions. The initiative at first had come from Andhra where N.G. Ranga, leader since 1933-34 of the Provincial Ryot's Association and a separate ZaminRyot's Association for zamindari tenants, had been trying from 1935 both to extend the Kisan movement to the other three linguistic regions of Madras Presidency, as well as to draw in sections of agricultural labourers. A South Indian Federation of Peasants and Agricultural Labour. Started in April 1935 with Ranga as general Secretary, suggested in its conference of October 1935 the immediate formation of an All India Kisan body. The socialists took up the idea at their Meerut Conference in January 1936, and though Bihar (the other main base of the early Kisan movement) seems to have been unenthusiastic at first about what was feared would be rather formal unity, Sahajanand Saraswati eventually agreed to preside over the first session of the All India Kisan Sabha in Lucknow in April, 1936. Another notable pioneer IndulalYajnik, the disillusioned Gandhian veteran from Gujrat who became editor of the *Kisan Bulletin*. As was probably inevitable, the Kisan Sabhas focussed mainly on the grievances of peasants with some (and at times considerable) land vis-à-vis zamindars, traders, money lenders, and the government. The Kisan Manifesto of August 1936 demanded abolition of zamindari, a graduated tax on agricultural incomes in excess of Rs 500 in place of the present land revenue, and cancellation of debts. It included also a minimum charter of demands: 50% cut in revenue and rent, full occupancy rights to all tenants, abolition of *beggar*, scaling-down of debts and interest-rates, and restoration of customary forest rights. The problems of class-differences within the peasantry, and of tensions between landholding peasants and landless labourers, would remain to plague the Kisan Sabha (and the entire left) throughout both in theory and practice. But the Kisan Manifesto did suggest transfer of uncultivated government and zamindari lands to peasants with less than five acres and to the landless, who would hopefully get organised into co-operatives; there was no demand, however, for any general ceiling on landholding. Sahajanand in an early issue of the *Kisan Bulletin* wanted an enquiry into agricultural wages, and visualized improvement in agrarian labour conditions 'by negotiating with the peasants, and by assisting their organised strike against zamindars and planters'—an interesting but not unnatural distinction'. (Source: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 339-41)

During the period 1930-34, another important development had been the formation of the Congress Socialist Party. The process started in jails where some young Congressmen who had got disappointed with the Gandhian strategy of alternatively starting struggles and then

withdrawing, sometimes apparently for no reason, only restart a new struggle after some time, read and learnt about the Marxist ideology and of the glorious example of the Soviet Union. At the time the only major Marxist alternative was the CPI (Communist Party of India) but the fact that they stood separate from the National Congress, the major anti-imperialist mass struggle of the nation dissuaded them from joining up with the CPI. So they decided that they needed to stay within the Congress and steer it away from bourgeoisie capitalist and *zamindari* interests towards socialism and class equality and social justice. The most important meetings of his group were held in Nasik jails in 1933 where the main participants were Jayaprakash Narayan, Achhut Patwardhan, Yusuf Mehrali, Ashok Mehta and Minoo Masani. The U.P. Congress leader Sampurnanad, their associate drafted a document called 'A Tentative Socialist Programme for India' in April 1934 and the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formally started in next month at a conference in Patna chaired by Narendra Dev. The CSP decided that the most important struggle underway was the nationalist struggle led by the National Congress for national freedom and that that struggle was a necessary route to socialism which was thus relatively secondary. They decided that all socialists must join the Congress and work within it for they would have no chance of success in influencing anything if they stayed out. As Acharya Narendra Dev, one of their major leaders, expressed it in 1934: 'it would be a suicidal policy for us to cut ourselves off from the national movement that the Congress undoubtedly represents; that they must give the Congress and the national movement a socialist direction; and that to achieve this objective they must organise the workers and peasants in their class organisations, wage struggles for their economic demands and make them the social base of the national struggle'. (Bipan Chandra and others, *India's struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, 1989, pp. 304-05 (quoted in) The CSP planned to work to spread the socialist ideology inside the Congress and make people familiar with it and also to steer the party into adopting a radical pro-labour and pro-peasant stand on current economic issues. They also decided that their effort would be of gradual persuasion and not of any event based dramatic showdown resulting in a triumph for their camp. As Jayaprakash Narayan instructed his followers in 1934: 'We are placing before the Congress a programme and we want the Congress to accept it. If the Congress does not accept it, we do not say we are going out of the Congress. If today we fail, tomorrow we will try and if tomorrow we fail, we will try again'. (Source: *ibid.* p.305)

The immediate tactical aim of the CSP was to gradually replace the leadership of the party at all levels particularly at the top to begin with because it was strongly felt by them that the leadership was incapable of transforming the struggle of the Congress into a peasant and labour supported mass struggle. They wished to replace the top leadership by members from their own group offering themselves as the centre of an alternative socialist leadership for the party. In this respect one can't help but conclude they were rather ambitious. At the Meerut meeting of the CSP in 1935 itself they had declared to themselves that their task was to 'wean away the anti-imperialist elements in the Congress away from its present bourgeoisie leadership and to bring them under the leadership of revolutionary socialism'. (Source: *ibid.*) Later they realised the difficulty of achieving this aim and decided to try and infiltrate the leadership at all levels. Initially they had quite a bit of success in provinces like U.P. for instance where they managed to pack the Provincial Congress Committee with a majority of members of their persuasion but a lot of this early success was due to what Sumit Sarkar says was 'opportunistic support' and 'factional quarrels'.

As for ideological clarity and unity among the leaders of the CSP there wasn't much, according to Sumit Sarkar. He comments on it as follows:

'Ambiguities were there from the beginning, for the CSP wanted to remain within the Congress, but was sharply opposed to its leadership and ready to cooperate with non-Congress Leftist groups. The ideology of its founders ranged from vague and mixed-up radical nationalism to fairly firm advocacy of Marxian 'scientific socialism', which Narendra Dev at the Patna meeting distinguished sharply from mere 'social reformism'. Right leaning Congress leaders disliked the new trend intensely, Sitaramayya going so far as to describe its founders as 'scum' in a letter to Patel on 21 September 1934, and the Working Committee in June 1934 condemned 'loose talk about confiscation of private property and necessity of class war' as contrary to non-violence. Nehru was sympathetic, but never formally joined the CSP.....' (Source: *ibid.* p. 332) Sumit Sarkar also points out that eventually most of the CSP leaders went on to have 'extremely chequered and by no means consistently Leftist political careers in the future'. (Source: *ibid.* p. 333)

Bipan Chandra (and others) comment on the ideological variety of Congress Socialist Party (CSP) as follows:

'From the beginning the CSP leaders were divided into three broad ideological currents: the Marxian, the Fabian and the current influenced by Gandhiji. This would not have been a major weakness – in fact it might have been a source of strength – for a broad socialist party, which was a movement. But the CSP was already a part, and a cadre-based party at that, within a movement that was the National Congress. Moreover, the Marxism of the 1930s was incapable of accepting as legitimate such diversity of political currents on the Left. The result was a confusion which plagued the CSP till the very end. The party's basic ideological differences were papered over for a long time because of the personal bonds of friendship and a sense of comradeship among most of the founding leaders of the party, the acceptance of Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan as its senior leaders, and its commitment to nationalism and socialism.

Despite the ideological diversity among the leaders, the CSP as a whole accepted a basic identification of socialism with Marxism. Jayaprakash Narayan, for example, observed in his book *Why Socialism?* that 'today more than ever before it is possible to say that there is only one type, one theory of socialism – Marxism'. (Source: *ibid.* p. 306)

The CSP activists achieved some striking successes throughout 1933-34 in developing close connections with the emerging Kisan Sabha Movement, particularly in Bihar and Andhra, and very soon were being almost seen as their representatives in the Congress by large sections of peasants. They organised several *kisan* marches throughout coastal Andhra districts and the Ellore Zamindari Ryots conference in 1933 demanding abolition of zamindari for instance and the CSP leader, N.G. Ranga started an Indian Peasant Institute at Nidubrolu to train *kisan* cadres.

Later after the 1935 shift of the party's stance in the CPI of joining the national movement under the leadership of the Congress, the CSP and the communists of the CPI and other communist groups converged in their political purpose. Sumit Sarkar points out that 'the CSP throughout the mid and late-1930s acted objectively as a kind of bridge across which radical nationalists passed on their road to the full fledged Marxism of the Communist Party'. N.G. Ranga, a major CSP leader, for instance even bitterly complained later that the CPI had weaned away one-third of the 2000 peasant youths he had trained at Nidubrolu, and almost 90% of the original Andhra CSP membership. (Source: Sumit Sarkar, *'Modern India'*, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 334)

The strong leftist influence on the Congress led National Movement ultimately happened to a very large extent due to the convictions, efforts and influence of two leading and charismatic leaders – Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose.

Jawaharlal Nehru had been sent to Brussels in February 1927 to participate in the 'Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism' where he met many representatives of the third world nationalist and socialist forces leaving him very impressed with the anti-imperialist socialist solidarity and his famous biographer S. Gopal believes this participation had been a 'turning point' in his 'mental development'. He was appointed honorary president of the League against Imperialism and for National Independence. He and his father were invited to the Soviet Union in November 1927. The Soviet visit moved him from profoundly and at a very deep level gave him his lifelong commitment for socialism. He wrote glowingly of the impressions that country made on him for the *Hindu* newspaper and his writings were later published in a book form in 1928 as *Soviet Russia*. The title page of the book quoted Wordsworth on the French Revolution ('Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, But to be young was very heaven') and he clearly indicated his approval of the 'country of the hammer and sickle, where workers and peasants sit on the thrones of the mighty'. (Source: Sumit Sarkar, 'Modern India', Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 253 (quoted in) Nehru as a rising leader of the Congress particularly of the youth was gaining in prominence and so when he declared in December 1928 while addressing a Socialist Youth Conference that independence was 'a necessary preliminary to communistic society' clearly indicating thereby that that would be his ideal, he attracted attention. Jawaharlal could only become the president of the Congress because of Gandhi's support who probably realised that the restive youth sold on communism would not put up with a candidate from the bourgeoisie right of the party. He was clearly the compromise in many ways. Jawaharlal made his ideological preferences clear in the first of his many brilliant presidential addresses in December 1929 at the Lahore session of the Congress putting before the party a new internationalist and socially-radical perspective for the freedom movement. He bluntly and boldly declared:

'I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings and princes of industry...' (Source; *ibid.* p. 283) Without pulling any punches he ridiculed the 'trusteeship' concept of Gandhi which Gandhi had been trying to use in zamindar-peasant and capital-labour conflicts by saying: 'Many Englishmen honestly consider themselves the trustees for India, and yet to what a condition they have reduced our country!'

Later in his life Jawaharlal moved from the left to the centre and even allowed his leftist leanings and principles to be compromised under the pressure of Indian capitalists. Indian capitalists and the far right had always been alarmed at the leftist development in the Congress and were fighting a cold war of sorts from the thirties onwards to sideline and root out all leftist and communist influence. When Jawaharlal Nehru was in jail in 1931 he worked out a fairly radical agrarian program and the basic element what was to become the basic element of a left nationalist strategy in the mid-1930s – the demand for a Constituent Assembly as the central political slogan. Later though he diluted most of his radical proposals and again and again would surrender to Gandhiji's wishes. Perhaps he had been morally weakened after the death of his father, Motilal Nehru, and also realised that it was Gandhi and not he who had the mass appeal to unite and keep the notational movement on track.

Subhash Chandra Bose came on the political scene in 1920-21 when he resigned from the ICS and joined the Non- Cooperation and Khilafat Movement, as an under study of sorts of

DeshBandhuChittaRanjan Das. The ICS was the most prestigious professional occupation those days in terms of social status and prestige and so his resigning itself attracted a lot of attention.

From the 1920s onwards, post the Russian Revolution and the creation of the Soviet Union, leftist thoughts had started influencing Indian leaders, some anyway and C.R. Das had been one such leader. As early as in 1924, as President of the Fourth Congress of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the DeshBandhu declared:

'Swaraj must be for the 98 percent toiling masses and not for the two percent upper classes. Swaraj must not mean mere replacement of the white by the brown bureaucracy.' (Source: GautamChattopadhyaya, 'Subhash Chandra, Indian Leftist Movement and the Communist Party', in Subhash Chandra Bose, HarAnand Publication, 1998, New Delhi, p. 80 (quoted in)) How alarmed the British had been at the development of leftist influence can be gauged from a secret wire that the Viceroy of India sent in 1922 to the Secretary of State for India saying, "a section of the extremists, C.R. Das included, and some newspapers have been attracted by M.N. Roy's doctrine of rousing the masses. The methods and ideas of the Bolsheviks also naturally appeal to men like the Bengal ex-detenus." (Source: *ibid.*)

Subhash Bose had thus in probability come under leftist influence under C.R. Das. He was invited along with the son of C.R. Das to attend the Communist International as delegates not as communists but as left wing Indian nationalists along with a full-fledged communist like S.A. Dange. The Communist International at that time as per its then policy was trying to forge unity in anti-colonial movements and hence invited Bose even though he wasn't seen as a full communist. He had become friendly to communists over the years and at this stage helped them by giving shelter to underground communists from abroad like Abani Mukherjee and Nalini Gupta. He offered a platform mainly within the Congress for people with a leftist persuasion to congregate around. He was in jail between 1924 and 1927. In the interim years the participation of industrial workers in the national struggle increased and they provided the bulk of the participants more than ever before. Also the trade union movement gathered pace and there was massive strike action all over the country particularly in the jute, textile and railway industries. In the agitation against the Simon Commission the working class was at the forefront and provided the bulk of the people-power in the general strikes and the black flag demonstrations. These strikes were increasingly mostly organised jointly by Left-wing Congressmen, Socialists and Communists who were thus winning the opportunity to influence Congress policy more than ever before.

Thus when in the Calcutta session of the Congress Subhash Chandra moved an amendment to the main resolution asking for complete independence and not Dominion Status to be made the official goal of the Indian National Congress and the amendment was narrowly defeated because of opposition from Gandhi, Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhai Patel etcetc – the same Gandhi plus right-wing combination with increasing acquiesces from Nehru, and who would triumph repeatedly and tone down and even eliminate leftist influence over the next decades – the rank and file of the left nationalists was naturally disappointed. The very next day, a massive demonstration of industrial workers, jointly led by left-wing nationalists, socialists and communists, entering the Congress *pandal* and unanimously adopting a resolution declaring complete independence to be the immediate goal of the Indian working class movement.

The British in their attempts at controlling the national movement had all along focussed the most on the leftists who they saw as the most dangerous enemies to their interests and just after Subhash Chandra had been elected President of the All India Trade union congress with

communist support alongside S.V. Deshpande, a Bombay communist who was elected general secretary, he was badly beaten up and arrested by the British Police on January 26, 1931 for leading the Independence Day demonstration even though he was the elected Mayor of the Calcutta corporation at that point.

At this point, the unfortunate historic turning away from mainstream national movements was effected by the international communist movement and the Indian communists following that line ended up describing genuine left nationalists like Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Bose as "representatives of the capitalists working class working against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses of our country". But by 1935 the communists changed their policy again and were ready to work with the broad nationalist movement. Subhash Chandra Bose spent three years in Europe to recover from his illness but came back soon to take over as the President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. His relationship with the communists was as close as ever and his vice-president in the Provincial Congress Committee was one Bankim Mukherjee, an outstanding communist leader. Another communist leader, Panchugopal Bhaduri became his assistant secretary.

Needless to say, the constant identification of Subhash Chandra had made him many enemies from the right and bourgeoisie inside the Congress and now the Congress was spilt down the middle along right left lines. In 1938 Subhash Chandra had been unanimously elected as the President in the Haripura session but in 1939 when the question of his re-election came up, the entire Right-wing congress leadership opposed it. At that point P.C. Joshi, who was general secretary of the illegal CPI asked communists in the legal communist weekly to help in re-electing Subhash. Congress Socialists, followers of M.N. Roy and the communists unitedly supported Subhash and he was re-elected defeating the official Congress candidate, Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Subhash Chandra's victory was seen by the left rank and file as their victory and Subhash wrote an article in the communist journal called 'Carry Forward the Heritage of Struggle' saying "My heartiest congratulations to the National Front for its consistent stand for the national line of struggle and for the unification and consolidation of Left forces". (Source: *ibid.*)

So in 1939 in a way came the finest hour for the unity of leftist forces trying to steer the Congress away from bourgeois capitalist forces but it was not to last, as is evident from the following account of the flurry of action that Subhash led from then on:

'In July, 1939, Subhash Chandra took the initiative to form the Left Consolidation Committee (LCC), primarily with strong communist support. Apart from the communists, the committee included representatives of the followers of M.N. Roy, a section of the Congress Socialist Party and the outstanding militant Bihar peasant leader Swami Sahajanand Saraswati. This, in fact, was the heyday of Left unity in India and the period when relations between Subhash Chandra Bose and the Indian communist leaders were the most cordial.

In September, 1939, the Second World War broke out. Subhash Chandra Bose, who had meanwhile built up his own organisation – the All India Forward Bloc – had declared quite some time before the Second World War that the object of the Forward Bloc was to "rally" all radical and anti-imperialist progressive elements in the country on the basis of a minimum program representing the greatest common measure of agreement among radicals of all shades of opinion. Subhash Chandra had hoped that the Socialists, Communists and Royists would join his Forward Bloc. However, that did not happen. The Socialists, Communists, and Royists were certainly agreeable to joint activities and action with the Forward Bloc, but did not join it. The CPI, while strongly condemning the attacks of the Right-wing Congress leadership against

Subhash Bose, did not endorse the policy of Forward Bloc. While Subhash Chandra was prepared to go forward with or without the Congress, the CPI declared that the correct tactics were to push the entire congress towards struggle.

Subhash Chandra, therefore, persuaded his All India Forward Bloc, during its first conference at Bombay in the middle of 1939, to approve the formation of a *Left Consolidation Committee*, which would be a relatively loose alliance. The LCC was to have an equal number of representatives from the Forward Bloc, the CPI, the CSP and the Royists. This alliance was unstable for more than one reason. The CPI and CSP, by this time, were almost always at each other's throat, while the strident anti-Fascism of M.N. Roy was not to the liking of many Forward Bloc leaders, like SatyaRanjanBakshi and H.V. Kamath, who held strong anti-Soviet views.' (Source: *ibid.*)

The beginning of the Second World War triggered a series of events. Subhash Chandra Bose was of the view that Indian National Movement should take advantage of the war situation and CPI was in agreement with him. The illegal CPI in its politbureau meeting of October, 1939, declared: "The task of the Indian people is the revolutionary utilisation of the war crisis for the achievement of national freedom.....the capture of power is an immediately realisable goal". (Source: *ibid.*)

The right wing of the Congress with the full support and acquiescence of Gandhi and a passive ambiguous approach of sorts from Nehru decided to offer full support to the British to fight Fascism. Subhash Bose in 1940 at the annual conference of the All India Students Federation, a united organization of Leftists in which the communists were dominant, declared in a speech that the Right wing Congress leadership was shirking from a struggle. "I presume", he said, "that they are afraid that once a nation-wide campaign is launched, the control and leadership of the nationalist movement will pass out of their hands...The time has come for all of us to dare and act...only then shall we win victory and swaraj". (Source: *ibid.*) Due to these statements and the rather opposite stand of the Congress Right, the British government realised in no time that the Subhash Bose – CPI combine posed the greatest threat to their rule and immediately launched into a campaign of repression arresting known communists and the supporters of the Forward Bloc. Subhash himself was arrested under the Defence of India Act in Calcutta on July 2, 1940 and lodged in the Presidency jail.

The famous history of what happened after that with Subhash Bose's escape from prison and his going to Germany and later forming the Indian National Army to fight a war against British occupation of India with help from the Axis powers is well known. He chose the Axis Powers as his main allies during the Second World War acting on the basis of the age-old premise of an 'enemy's enemy is a friend' but unfortunately no political force back home could support him in this strategic ploy. Since the Soviet Union was at war with Hitler's Germany and due to the ideological principles of Fascism, the CPI had to oppose any alliance however strategic or temporary and they did. M.N. Roy and his Radical Democratic Party had opposed fascism vehemently through out and so were in no position to offer any support to Subhash Bose's plans. Nor did the CSP support him and both Nehru and to a lesser extent AbulKalam Azad opposed the stand Subhash took. There were elements in the extreme right wing and from the Hindu right within the Congress who had sympathies for Fascism but they were so much to the right and in close collaboration with Indian capitalists that they couldn't possibly have emerged as allies of Subhash Chandra Bose. SardarVallabhai Patel for instance had strong sympathies for Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese military forces.

Thus Bose was in an opposite camp to the left from this period on but Gautam Chattopadhyaya says communist historians should accept that the assessment of the Indian Communist Movement at that time about Subhash Bose of him having become a quisling of the Axis Powers was wrong which he says has not been borne out by historical evidence that emerged in later years. But he also says that all admirers of Netaji have to admit that Subhash Bose did fail to estimate the extent of evil of the Axis Powers and the ideology of imperialism and racist dictatorship that they followed. He says there is every possibility that in the light of the further evidence that emerged on these regimes after his death he would have reviewed his alliance just as all the nationalist movements in Malaya, Indonesia and the Philippines did. Gautam Chattopadhyaya sums up the impact of Subhash Chandra Bose in his life (and even after his death) on the national movement as follows:

'...in the explosive and unprecedented post-war revolutionary upsurges in India from November 1945 to February, 1946, when millions of workers, peasants, students as well as members of the Indian armed forces threw up barricades and hoisted the banner of revolt for the overthrow of the British rule in India, the driving force in every revolt was the legend of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and his INA. In all these revolts, the CPI and all other Leftists played a heroic and glorious part. Thus in a profounder sense, Left unity on a grand scale was forged by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose – not by himself in person but by his immortal legend'. (Source: *ibid.* p. 89)

Whether it was the contribution of charismatic individuals like Subhash Chandra Bose or not it is remarkable that the broad left -- the CPI, CSP, Nehru, Bose himself and other left groups could and did function together since 1935 for so long. This was made possible more than anything by the fact that they shared a common political programme, which enabled them, despite ideological and organisational differences to work together. The main program that the left adhered to were:

1. A consistent and militant anti-imperialism (which distinguished them quite starkly at times from the Congress Right and even Gandhi who every now and then appeared to look like they were well wishers of the British colonial rule of India)
2. Firm anti-landlordism (on which again the Right and even Gandhi varied from being ambiguous to being totally against any measures introduced to eliminate or diminish the evil of *zamindari*)
3. Organising and promoting the Trade Union Movement and *KisanSabhas* which for the first time gave the workers and peasants any sort of a voice
4. The promotion of the acceptance of a socialistic vision of society in independent India and of a socialistic program of the economic and social transformation of society
5. An anti-fascist, anti-colonial and anti-war foreign policy.

Bipan Chandra and others believe part of this failure of the Left was due to the tendency of the Left of fighting the dominant Congress leadership on wrong issues and their inability to show 'ideological and tactical flexibility'. They comment as follows:

'It (the left) sought to oppose the right wing with simplistic formulae and radical rhetoric. It fought the right wing on slippery and wrong grounds. It chose to fight not on questions of ideology but on methods of struggle and on tactics. For example, its most serious charge against the Congress right-wing was that it wanted to compromise with imperialism, that it was frightened of mass struggle, that its anti-imperialism was not whole hearted because of bourgeoisie influence over it. The right wing had little difficulty in disposing of these charges. The people rightly believed it and not the Left. Three important occasions may be cited as example. In 1936-37, the Left fought the Right within the Congress on the issue of elections and office acceptance, which was seen as a compromise with imperialism. In 1939-42, the fight was waged on the issue of the initiation of a mass movement, when Gandhi's reluctance was

seen as an aspect of his soft attitude towards imperialism and as the missing of a golden opportunity. And, in 1945-47, the Left confronted the dominant Congress leadership, including Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad, on the question of imperialism's last ditch effort to prolong their domination and the tired congress leadership's hunger for power or even betrayal.....The Left also failed to make a deep study of Indian reality.....saw the dominant Congress leadership as bourgeois, its policy of negotiations as working towards a 'compromise' with imperialismIt took recourse to a simplistic model of analysing Indian social classes and their political behaviour.....constantly counter posed armed struggle to non-violence as a superior form and method of struggle, rather than concentrating on the nature of mass involvement and mobilization and ideology. It was convinced that the masses were ever ready for struggles in any form if only the leaders were willing to initiate them. It constantly over estimated its support among the people. Above all, the Left failed to grasp the Gandhian strategy of struggle.' (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, 'India's struggle for independence', Penguin Books, 1989, pp. 307-8) They also of course point out that the weakness of disunity in the left was also a major reason for their failure.

Sumit Sarkar points out that the years 1935-36 'saw the emergence of a pattern in Indian politics which would be repeated often, both before and after independence.....outwardly, all the signs were of a significant lurch to the Left: growing Socialist and communist activity (despite the 1934 ban on the CPI), numerous labour and peasant struggles, the formation of several Left-led all-India mass organisations, and Congress Presidential addresses by Nehru.....which formally seemed to embody virtually all the radical aspirations and programmes of the Left.....yet in the end the Right within the Congress was able to skilfully and effectively ride and indeed utilize the storm.....'. (Source: SumitSarkar, 'Modern India', Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 338)

The events of the Tripuri session of the Congress in 1939 contains all the elements of what ailed the left movement. At the 1939 Tripuri session, eight CSP leaders proposed to Bose that he stand for the Presidency of the Congress. Bose raised the demand for a radical call of a 'National Demand' for Swaraj which would be time bound and linked his candidature to this demand but SumitSarkar believes 'it is difficult to avoid the impression that the issue was to a considerable extent personal'. (Source: SumitSarkar, 'Modern India', Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p. 372) The congress high command had been ever getting increasingly hostile to any labour or peasant militancy under the influence of leaders in the party close to zamindari and industrial interests and of course those communities in general had been generous with funding to the Congress. So when Bose's nomination was announced against their candidate Sitarammaya, a confrontation was set up and the entire left rallied around Bose. Gandhi explicitly declared that Sitaramayya was his candidate after Maulana Azad had withdrawn, who had been a third candidate. Subhash Bose was elected by 1580 votes against 1377 of the right wing Sitarammaya. What happened after that is very interesting. Sumit Sarkar comments on it as follows:

'Immensely superior tactics and Left's lack of unity enabled Gandhi and the Congress Right to snatch victory from the jaws of an apparently decisive defeat. Gandhi immediately made the issue a matter of his own personal prestige by declaring Sitarammaya's defeat to be more 'mine than his' (31 January). On 22 February 13 out of the 15 members of the old Working Committee resigned, on the ground that Subhash had publicly criticized them; they included, after the usual wobbling and on a somewhat different pretext, Nehru. The Tripuri session (8-12 march) found Bose temporarily almost incapacitated by illness, and Gandhi back from a fast in Rajkot which had won some concessions for the time being. The Right pressed home their offensive through the famous resolution moved by GovindBallav Pant expressing confidence in the old Working

Committee, reiterating his faith in the Gandhian policies followed during the last 20 years, and asking Bose to nominate his new executive 'in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji'. The resolution was carried by 218 to 133 votes in the Subjects Committee, and by an overwhelming majority through show of hands in the open session. Nehru's support was not unexpected: apart from his ultimate loyalty to Gandhi, his personal equation with Bose had never been happy. But Socialists, Royists and Communists (except for some Bengal members like BankimMukherji) also failed to oppose the Pant resolution out of a desire to avoid a complete split. Jayaprakash (Narayan) even moved, and Nehru and the Communist Bhardawaj supported, the extremely diluted National Demand resolution which dropped Bose's idea of a time-bound ultimatum and merely called for preparations for a struggle to achieve a Constituent Assembly through strengthening the Congress.....It may be argued that a more fundamental mistake from the Left point of view lay in the failure both before and after Tripuri to resist more effectively the increasingly anti-labour and anti-*kisan* policies of the Congress ministries. This was the result of a united front which in practice at times came to be identified with a desire to retain unity with top Congress leaders at all costs.....' (Source: *ibid.* , pp.373-74)

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the revolutionary extremists emerge and what were their successes?
2. Trace the origin and development of the Communists.
3. Write an essay on the Congress Socialists.

SUGGESTED READINGS

1. *Modern India 1857-1947* , SumitSarkar, Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983
2. *India Today*, R. Palme Dutt, Manisha, Calcutta, 1970

GROWTH OF COMMUNALISM

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- Growth of Communalism and Solidification of Religious Boundaries
- The Politics of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' mobilisation

Ever since the 1857 revolt the British were aware of the danger that ensues when Indians put up a united front. That was the first time when large parts of India had seen Hindus and Muslims unite and fight the British posing a serious threat to the continuance of the British in India. The British anyway were always aware that India was a large country with many religions and communities and 'divide and rule' was one of the strategies they relied on as a matter of policy. Mountstuart Elphinstone, a Governor of Bmbay during the East India Company's rule had once written: '*Divide etempera* was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours'. The first policy manifestation of this policy was indeed the reorganisation of the Indian army post the revolt of 1857. Prior to that the ranks of the forces under the company were mixed with recruits from all ranks. There was no separation by caste or clan. It was this unity, the British came to believe, which made the revolt possible. Also the British had turned very suspicious of the Muslims after the revolt as they felt the Muslims had been the chief instigators of the revolt. So they were excluded from the Army and the Government. In 1888 the Dufferin Reform Committee proposed that steps should be taken to secure the representation of the different *classes and interests* as opposed to Indians generally and the 'classes and interests' selected for representation in the Legislative Council of the Viceroy were Hindus, Muslims, Europeans, and Anglo Indians, merchants and manufacturers, planters, Presidency Corporations, urban classes of the Mofussil, rural classes and professional and military classes. Indeed long before a Muslim deputation lobbying for special favours to Muslims met Lord Minto in 1906, in 1892, while the Indian Councils Bill of 1892 was being introduced and debated in the British parliament, Lord Kimberly had demanded that provisions should be made for the representation of minorities by making the following observations in the House of Lords: 'It has been found in this country not very easy to protect the interests of minorities by any contrivance that can be devised, but there must be found some mode in India of seeing that minorities, such as the important body of Muslims, who are in a minority in parts of the country are fully represented'. (Source: quoted in Abdul Majid Khan, *Origin and Growth of Communalism in India*, p. 18)

Professor Bipan Chandra has preferred to break down the evolution of the phenomenon of communalism into three stages as follows: 'First, it is the belief that people who follow the same religion have common secular interests, that is, common political, economic, social and cultural interests...From this arise the notion of socio-political communities based on religion...The second element of communal ideology rests on the notion that in a multi-religious society like India, secular interests, that is the social, cultural, economic and political interests of the followers of one religion are dissimilar and divergent from the interests of the followers of another religion...The third stage of communalism is reached when the interests of the followers of different religions or of different 'communities' are seen to be mutually incompatible,

antagonistic and hostile' and the communalist 'asserts at this stage that the Hindu and Muslim cannot have common secular interests, that their secular interests are bound to be opposed to each other'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.398-99) Thus communalism inevitably takes the form of communal politics or politics based on a communal ideology eventually and all the different communal political groups are fundamentally similar in that they make their claim to represent their respective constituencies politically on the basis that there are special interests of people belonging to the particular community that they represent and that has not been properly represented. Professor Chandra has further named the second stage as mentioned above as the phase of liberal or moderate communalism and the third stage as the phase of 'extreme communalism'. He says in the second stage the 'liberal communalist' is 'basically a believer in and practitioner of communal politics; but he still upheld certain liberal, democratic, humanist and nationalist values...while holding that Indian consisted of distinct religion based communities, with their own separate and special interests which sometimes came into conflict with each other, he continued to believe and profess publicly that these different communal interests could be gradually accommodated and brought into harmony with the overall, developing national interests, and Indian built as a nation.' It is the opinion of Professor Bipan Chandra that most of the communalist before 1937 – the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League, the Ali Brothers after 1925, MA Jinnah, Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai, and N.C. Kelkar after 1922 – functioned within a liberal communal framework. In the third stage or the stage of extreme communalism fear and hatred prevailed with a tendency to use abuses and violence on each other and a state of war and enmity against communal political opponents. It is in this stage, in the context of India, where the respective communal leaders declared that Muslim or Hindu religion, culture and people were in danger or being finished off and hence could not co-exist with each other. That led to the conclusion that the two communities can not live as one nation and must part. Professor Bipan Chandra says the 'Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha after 1937 and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) increasingly veered towards extreme communalism'. He further observes: 'Though the three stages of communalism were different from one another, they also interacted and provided a certain continuum. Its first element or stage fed liberal and extreme communalism and made it difficult to carry on a struggle against them. Similarly the liberal communalist found it difficult to prevent the ideological transition to extreme communalism.' (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.399-400)

The politics of communal divide obscured the divisions of economic class, caste, regional peculiarities etc and focussed only on the communal interest flowing from religious denominations. It has been argued people belonging to a particular geographical region from different religious denomination have more in common in terms of ways of life, food habits etc and even social and economic concerns than people from the same religious community in some far off other region. Thus to some extent the divide may be unreal but at the same time the communalistic political leader would have no interest to represent if no such interest whatever existed.

In India it has been noted communal politics really was born in the British period. Jawaharlal Nehru once noted in 1936: 'One must never forget that communalism in India is a latter day phenomenon which has grown up before our eyes'. (Source: Nehru, *Selected Works*, Volume 7, p. 69). In this origin and growth of communalism there were many reasons. One of the most important were the economic. The British colonial rule changed the economy drastically to the ruin of many people and the enrichment of many thus disrupting the centuries old systems and patterns. The permanent settlement and the creation of the zamindari system and the growth of agriculture

oriented towards cash crops and profits leading to the growth of a merchant class all were factors that played a role. also of course there was the crippling land revenue regime which caused destitution and poverty in rural India. The new jobs in administration and the government were also a factor particularly since they came to be available only to the better educated.

Hindus were ahead particularly in some areas like Bengal in educating themselves particularly in western sciences and became dominant in government services and the professions like the law. Government jobs were a major source of tension between the communities eventually as the competition for them increased. Muslim leaders like Sir Syed Ahmed Khan were at the fore front of persuading the British to give up their previous suspicions of the Muslims and he started the Aligarh Muslim University to educate Muslims in the liberal western education (and in the English language) so that Muslims may be able to compete for government jobs and maintain the position of power in governance that they had lost. At first he was all for Hindu-Muslim unity and many Hindus actually contributed financially for the setting up of the university. But later he became extremely suspicious of any joint Hindu Muslim political position as he felt the Hindus would dominate in any representative system as was advocated by the Indian National Congress as they were more numerous and would have more votes and were also better educated and ahead. Thus he also did not agree with the Congress that entry to jobs in administrative services should be by open competitive examinations and should not be restricted to men of higher birth. Sir Syed therefore firmly planted a suspicion in the Muslim mind (particularly of the elite landlords and the middle class) that they would be swamped and outnumbered and rendered weaker in any democratic representative system. He demanded from the British safeguards (what would be referred to as 'reservations' in modern India) for Muslims in government jobs, legislative councils, district boards and demanded the British should give recognition to the historic role of the Muslims in ruling India. He urged the member of the Muslim community to cooperate with the British and appealed to the British to stay on in India 'for many years – in fact for ever'. As Coupland has observed the 'The Moslem recoil from Congress nationalism was mainly Ahmed's doing'. (Source: Quoted in N.S. Bose, Indian National Movement – An Outline, p.109)

After Sir Syed's demise the communal argument was only further developed in Aligarh and came to be known as the Aligarh Movement. In this a British, Theodore Beck, who became the principal of the Aligarh College from 1883-99 played a major role. He argued and persuaded the Muslims that Hindus and Muslims were two nations and a parliamentary system was inappropriate for a united India as it would only lead to the oppression of the numerically weaker Muslims by the Hindus. He had opposed open competitive examinations for government jobs and had said they would 'just advantage the Bengalis'. It is to be remembered Bengali Hindus (particularly the higher castes) were far ahead at that time educationally and in thus dominated government jobs and professions like law and western allopathic medicine of all native Indian communities.

Professor Bipan Chandra has suggested as a consequence of the stagnation in industry and in the rural areas, government service was a major avenue for employment for the middle classes and most of the employment for teachers, doctors and engineers was also under government control which fuelled communal divides. He puts it thus: '...communal politics could be used to put pressure on the Government to reserve and allocate its jobs as also seats in professional colleges on communal and caste lines. Consequently communal politics till 1937 was organised around government jobs, educational concessions, and the like as also political positions – seats in legislative councils, municipal bodies, etc – which enabled control over these and other

economic opportunities. It may also be noted that though the communalists spoke in the name of their 'communities', the reservations, guarantees and other 'rights' that they demanded were virtually confined to these two aspects. They did not take up any issues which were of interest to the masses'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.-405)

Also in many situations ordinary class exploitation and conflict and social tensions of other natures got converted into communal tensions. In some parts of the country there were powerful exploiting economic classes – landlords, money lenders, merchants and agricultural commodity commission agents (*artiyas*) who were Hindus whereas the exploited sections were Muslims or lower caste Hindus. This provided fertile ground for solidification of the communal divide in such areas. In East Bengal and in the Malabar, the struggle between tenant and landlord and the relationship of usurious exploitation between the peasant-debtor and the merchant-moneylender in Punjab could be said to be instances where what was essentially class exploitation and socio-economic tension caused polarisation along communal political lines. Particularly in Punjab, according to Professor Bipan Chandra was 'the effort by big Muslim landlords to protect their economic and social position by using communalism to turn the anger of their Muslim tenants Hindu traders and money-lenders, and the use of communalism by the latter to protect their threatened class interests by raising the cry of Hindu interests in danger'. He further comments as follows: 'In reality, the struggle of the peasants for their emancipation was inevitable. The question was what type of ideological-political content it would acquire. Both the communalists as well as the colonial administrators stressed the communal as against the class aspects of agrarian exploitation and oppression. Thus, they held that the Muslim peasants and debtors were being exploited not as peasants and debtors but because they were Muslims...Communalism represented, at another level, a struggle between two upper classes or strata for power, privileges and economic gains. Belonging to different religions (or castes) these classes or strata used communalism to mobilise the popular support of their co-religionists in their mutual struggles. This was, for example, the case in Western Punjab where the Muslim landlords opposed the Hindu money lenders and in East Bengal where the Muslim *jotedars* (small landlords) opposed the Hindu *zamindars*.' (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.406-07) It is to be noted the both the Hindu and Muslim large land holders were replaced by powerful men of commerce like commission agents and moneylenders who were Hindus by the new economic system put in place by the British. A.R. Desai has concluded among the Hindus a modern intelligentsia, a modern educated middle class and a bourgeoisie for many different historical reasons occurred much before among Muslims and this class had established a kind of Hindu domination in government service and in key positions in trade, industry and finance which naturally was noted by the Muslim elite who were the losers and they therefore attempted to muster the support of the ordinary poorer mass of their community in their competitive struggle with their corresponding Hindu elite. R.P Dutt had written in that very era: 'Behind the communal antagonism lies social and economic questions. This is obvious in the case of middle class communalists competing for positions and jobs'. (Source: R. P. Dutt, *India Today and Tomorrow*, p. 89-90)

The communal parties and leaders who emerged later were supported by these elite forces and were their creation in many cases. Thus as Bipan Chandra has summarised: 'Above all, communalism developed as a weapon of economically and politically reactionary social classes and political forces – and semi-feudal landlords and ex-bureaucrats (whom Dr. K.M. Ashraf has called the *jagirdar* classes), merchants and money lenders and the colonial state. Communal leaders and forces were in general allied with these classes and forces. The social, economic and political vested interests deliberately encouraged or unconsciously adopted communalism

because of its capacity to destroy and divert popular struggles, to prevent the masses from understanding the socio-economic and political forces responsible for their social condition, to prevent unity on national and class lines, and to turn them away from their real national and socio-economic interests and issues and mass movements around them. Communalism also enabled the upper classes and the colonial rulers to unite with sections of the middle classes and to utilise the latter's politics to serve their own ends'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.406-07)

While this is mainly true subaltern historians like Sumit Sarkar have pointed out 'lower- class discontent often took on much less clear cut, 'sectional' form of different types of communal, caste or regional consciousness'. He points out one instance where in 'Kamariarchar in the Jamalpur sub-division of Mymensingh (in Bengal)...a *praja* conference in 1914 formulated a charter of *raiyyat* demands: rent-deduction, an end to cesses, relief for indebtedness, the right to plant trees and dig tanks without paying *nazar* to *zamindars*, as well as honourable treatment of Muslim tenants at the Hindu *zamindar's* court. The conference was organised by an affluent Muslim *raiyyat*, Chaudhuri Khos Mohammed Sarkar; it remained significantly silent about possible grievances of share croppers, and was attended by a number of Bengal political leaders, all of them Muslim – Fazlulhuq, Akram Khan, Abdul Kasem and others. Here was the beginning of a *Praja* movement which was to play an important part in the Bengal politics of the 1920s and 30s, reflecting agrarian discontent (more precisely perhaps, rich peasant or *jotedar* demands), but also contributing in the end to Muslim separatism.' (Source: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 156-57)

As has been mentioned above, the British from the very beginning, particularly after the 1857 revolt, had a definite policy of 'divide and rule'. It did not need the divisive tendencies among Indians or the Indian elite for them to take the available opportunities for dividing the people not just along religious lines but also caste versus caste, region versus region, province versus province etc. But what were the main policies and tools adopted by them. Firstly, by officially regarding Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as separate communities in official policy and for the purposes of government functioning and also by adopting separate laws particularly personal laws in the law courts. Secondly, whenever communal organisations or groups or leaders approached the British they were always entertained and treated as speaking for their respective communities even though there had never been any test like in elections to so treat them. Also thirdly, the communal provocations and agitations and press propagandas were usually shown a lot of tolerance without the worry for law and order and the prompt ruthless put down that was the case with nationalist freedom fighters and movements. Every now and then communal demands of communal parties and leaders were accepted which only helped the communal parties increase their following among their respective communities. The Congress could get none of their demands accepted between 1885 and 1905 but the demands of the newly organised Muslim communalists were accepted as soon as they were presented to the Viceroy. Lastly, the British seemed to encourage the propagation of virulent communal ideas because the propagation of such ideas were never clamped down and suppressed the same way that nationalist press and media outlets were suppressed. Additionally the government frequently rewarded the communal leaders by giving them and appointing them to important positions of power and profit in the government. Indeed, when communal riots broke out the government was seldom as energetic in crushing them as they were with nationalist upsurges.

Another strong factor in the growth of communalism was the alienation which Muslims felt at the strong Hindu tinge to the nationalist appeal. Starting with Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's Vande Mataram (an appeal to the mother Goddess) to the extremist leaders like Aurobindo and Tilak (who used Ganesh Puja and Shivaji Festivals to make nationalist sentiments stronger) there

had always been an appeal to the glorious Hindu traditions and past. Sometimes Muslim officials and rulers were even portrayed as tyrants who came from outside India. Even some leaders like Gandhi had made the mistake of sometimes taking the position that Muslims were Hindus originally and hence as Indian as Hindus. He did this to remove communal barriers in the hearts and minds of the two communities but it did not necessarily work out as he had hoped for. Bhikhu Parekh has commented on this aptly: '...India was not (Gandhi argued) a nation but a civilisation which had over the centuries benefited from the contributions of different races and religions and was distinguished by its plurality, diversity and tolerance. It was a community of communities, each enjoying considerable autonomy within a larger and shared framework. As for Hindus and Muslims, they had lived side by side in the villages and cities for centuries without ever feeling that they were enemies or oppressed one by the other. India was a united country long before the Muslims came, and it was absurd to argue it had ceased to be so afterwards. What was more, most Muslims were converted Hindus and their claim to nationhood was no more valid than would be that of a section of English citizens converted to Islam to a separate state in England. As Gandhi wrote to Jinnah, 'I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of a change of the faith of a very large body of her children'.

Gandhi's and other Congress leaders' description of Muslims as 'ex-Hindus', 'converts' and 'basically Hindus' caused much misunderstanding and resentment. The Muslims construed it as an implicit denial of their separate cultural identity and a sign of Hindu imperialism. They were both right and wrong, for Gandhi and the Congress used this term in two very different senses which they did not clearly distinguish. First, they used it in a *religious* sense implying that Muslims had once been Hindus who had later converted to Islam out of fear or hope of reward. In this sense the terms implied that they had betrayed their ancestral religion and were inauthentic Muslims, and carried derogatory overtones. The second sense of the term was *cultural* or civilisation-al and had quite different associations. It grew out of a search for the deeper bonds binding the two communities. Since the vast majority of Muslims had once been Hindus, they shared in common with them their beliefs, customs, social practices, values, and ways of life, and thought, in a word a civilisation. Their conversion to Islam changed their religious identity but could not and did not affect the deeper cultural continuity between the two communities. Indeed, they carried their old culture with them to their new religion and profoundly Indiansied it. They were therefore not just Muslims but Indian Muslims, Indians not merely in a territorial but cultural sense, and co-heirs with the Hindus to Indian civilisation. It is this that Gandhi intended to emphasise in describing them rather clumsily as 'ex-Hindus' or 'basically Hindus'. Since he did not clearly distinguish the two senses, and since many of his followers generally used the terms in their accusatory sense, their use was a source of irritation to Muslims.' (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 177ff) Indeed it was one of Gandhi's main strategic moves in countering communalism that he took up the issue of Khilafat which excepting a very small rather fundamentalist fringe, the vast majority of Muslims were not really very enthusiastic about as it involved the questions of far away Turkey and did not really touch the lives of the average Indian Muslim. Gandhi hoped that Khilafat will endear Hindus to Muslims and remove the deep distrust and chasm in terms of identity. The move to adopt the Khilafat cause surprised Hindus and even many in the Congress but Gandhi was adamant that it should be taken up with full energy. He even linked it to the Hindu's desire to see cow-slaughter end and told them the way forward was through Khilafat. For instance in a speech in Kanpur in 1921 he said: '...Cow protection also depends on Khilafat. Hindus must be prepared to make sacrifices for Khilafat without desiring anything in return. Every morning I pray for the cows.

Cow slaughter is the result of the sins committed by Hindus; it is owing to these sins that we are deprived of the sympathy of our brethren. We must repent for those sins. For a satisfactory solution of the Khilafat question it is of utmost importance that there should be Hindu-Muslim unity. Khilafat alone will unite the two communities'. (Source: *Collected Works of MK Gandhi, Vol. 20, p. 482*) But many Hindus could not understand Gandhiji's move and hence easily fell prey to the propaganda of the communalist Hindu organisations that Gandhiji was against Hindus. Politically even when gradually the Congress under Gandhi's leadership was losing its authority to speak for India's Muslims, Gandhi was fairly uncompromising for a very long time in his basic stance that the Congress and he had the right to represent India's Muslims as much as the Muslim League or other Muslim parties and political outfits. As late as 1946 when as per the negotiations of the Cabinet Mission Plan, an Executive Council was to be formed, the Congress nominated a Muslim to represent the Congress to which Jinnah objected and refused to go along with it, his argument being only the Muslim League had a right to represent Muslim and nominate a Muslim. When the Viceroy Wavell requested Gandhi to ask the Congress to waive the right to nominate a Muslim as Jinnah was obstinately objecting (and it may lead to violence) even though he himself had no problems with the basic position of the Congress, Gandhi refused and wrote to Wavell:

'You recognised fully the reasonableness of the Congress position, but you held that it would be an act of high statesmanship if the Congress waive the right for the sake of peace. I urge that if it was a question of waiving a right it would be a simple thing. It was a *question of non-performance of a duty* which the Congress owed to non-League Muslims.' (Source: *Wavell's Journal, Oxford University Press*)

Another problem was the obstinate identification of the past with the rulers who ruled. As Bipan Chandra has put it: 'The Hindu communalist readily adopted the imperialist view that medieval rulers in India were anti-Hindu, tyrannised Hindus and converted them forcibly. All communalist, as also imperialist, historians saw medieval history as one long story of Hindu-Muslim conflict and believed that throughout the medieval period there existed distinct and separate Hindu and Muslim cultures. The Hindu communalists described the rule of medieval Muslim rulers as foreign rule because of their religion. The talk of 'a thousand years of slavery' and 'foreign rule' was common rhetoric, sometimes even used by nationalists.....In turn the Muslim communalists harked back to the 'Golden Age of Islamic achievement' in West Asia and appealed to its heroes, myths and cultural traditions. They propagated the notion that all Muslims were the rulers in medieval India or at least the beneficiaries of the so called Muslim rule. They tended to defend and glorify all Muslim rulers including religious bigots like Aurungzeb. They also evolved their own version of the 'fall' theory. While Hindus were allegedly in the ascendant in the 19th century, Muslims, it was said 'fell' or declined as a 'community' throughout the nineteenth century after 'they' lost political power.' (Source: *Bipan Chandra and others, India's Struggle for Independence, pp.412*)

It has been mentioned above how Syed Ahmed Khan helped in giving birth to divisive thinking among Muslims asking them to be loyal to the British. After his death the Muslim communalists continued to follow the politics of loyalty to the British and were rewarded for that from time to time. They openly supported the British during the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal in 1905-06 and called Muslims who supported the movement 'vile traitors' of Islam. But some Muslims were drifting away from the communalists. Badruddin Tyabji presided over the Congress session in 1887, and the number of Muslim delegates to the Congress increased in the succeeding years.

The Muslim *jagirdari* class of large landlords and former *jagirdars* and *taluqdars* were not happy with the representation that they had in the Viceroy's Council and so in 1906 hearing that there was an expansion of the council contemplated went to the Viceroy in a delegation led by the Aga Khan and placed their demands which was basically that Muslims must be granted the status of a special community and given representation that not only was commensurate with their numerical strength but also gave due regard to the 'position they occupied in India a little more than a hundred years ago, and of which the traditions have naturally not faded from their minds'. They demanded separate communal electorates and right to decide and send their own representatives separately. At the end of 1907 the All India Muslim League was founded by these big *zamindars*, ex-bureaucrats and other upper class Muslims like agha Khan, the Nawab of Dhaka and Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk. The league decided to be loyal to the Muslims and pursue Muslim communal interests. They supported the partition of Bengal, asked for separate Muslim electorates and reserved seats for Muslims in legislative councils and in government jobs and openly warned the Muslims and the British that if the British left India the Muslims would be in 'constant danger of their life, property and honour'.

In parallel to the rise of the Muslim communalists there was also the rise of the Hindu communalist political formations. They constantly harped on the fact that India had been liberated from Muslim tyrannical rule by the British and a section of the Hindu money lenders, merchants and *zamindars* and middle class professionals began to actively support such voices. The other pet programs of these groups were anti cow slaughter and the propagation of Hindu in UP and Bihar by replacing Urdu. The Punjab Hindu sabha was founded in 1909 and they attacked the Congress for what they called sacrificing Hindu interests and the appeasement of Muslims. One of their prominent leaders Lal Chand described the Congress as 'the self-inflicted misfortune' of the Hindus who made impossible demands on the British government instead of neutralising them in the fight against Muslim domination. They also said every Hindu should understand that he is a Hindu first and an Indian later. The first session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha was held in 1915 but Professor Bipan Chandra says it remained a sickly child compared to the Muslim League. According to him the reasons were as follows: 'The broader social reason was the greater and even dominant role of the *zamindars*, aristocrats and ex-bureaucrats among Muslims in general and even among the Muslim middle classes. While among Parsis and Hindus, increasingly, it was the modern intelligentsia, with its emphasis on science, democracy and nationalism, and the bourgeois elements in general, which rapidly acquired intellectual, social, economic and political influence and hegemony, among Muslims the reactionary landlords and *mullahs* continued to exercise dominant influence or hegemony'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.418)

In the factors for the growth of Hindu communalism many have argued the weakness of the Congress in opposing the communal demands of the League which the British kept on accepting was also a problem. But the British government never patronised the Hindu groups the same way since they probably realised the majority of Hindus were with the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha nevertheless kept to its ideology steadfastly never making any strategic adjustments in search of political popularity. Savarkar, its somewhat charismatic leader openly said that India must be a Hindu nation and Muslims should be contented with the status of a minority. The Sabha declared its aim as the 'maintenance, protection and promotion of the Hindu race, Hindu culture and Hindu civilisation, and the advancement of the glory of the Hindu Rashtra'. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) had formally no links with the Hindu Mahasabha but was really their arm. It was designed and propagated a social organisation as distinct from the Hindu Mahasabha which declared itself as a political organisation.

The British helped the spread of communalism when they accepting the demands of the communalist Muslim leaders of the League under the Morley-Minto reforms introduced separate constituencies from which only a Muslim could stand as a candidate and for which only Muslims could vote. This system was initially introduced for Muslims and later extended to Sikhs. This system allowed blatant communal appeals for only co-religionists voted for a candidate under the new system. How pleased the British were with these developments can be gauged from what one official said when he wrote to Lady Minto: 'I must send Your Excellency a line to say that a very big event has happened today; a work of statesmanship that will affect India and Indian history for many a long year. It is nothing less than the pulling back of sixty-two million people from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition'.

Gandhiji had embraced the Khilafat cause to build Hindu Muslim unity. But the Khilafat cause was propagated by the more conservatives fringe among Muslims. Later in 1916 there was a compromise pact between the Congress and the League under which the Congress accepted the systems of separate electorates and the reservation of seats for minorities in the legislatures in exchange for the league supporting complete home rule or independence from the British. This pact granted a legitimacy to communal politics it never had. Thus the way was paved for future further hardening of communal stands.

Even though Gandhi had been firm in his publicly argued principled positions he had begun to sense that the communal problem was going out of the hands of the national leaders and the Congress even in the 1920s. Bhikhu Parekh has researched this well and explains:

'Around 1926, Gandhi's views began to undergo a decisive change. In that year he wrote to Nehru that the two communities were going 'more and more away from each other'. He told a meeting in Bengal a year later that the 'Hindu-Muslim problem had passed out of human hands into God's hands'. He told Jinnah a few months later that he wished he could do something, but was 'utterly hopeless'. He kept striving for unity, but increasingly felt that the British policy of 'divide and rule' stood in the way and that nothing could be done until after independence. He told Ansari in 1930 that 'the third party, the evil British power' was creating the difficulties. Over a year later he wrote that 'the moment the alien wedge is removed, the divided communities are bound to unite'. He repeated the view as late as 1942 and thought that 'unity will not precede but succeed freedom'. This was why he kept urging Jinnah to delay partition until after independence and assured him that if things did not work out, he would have his Pakistan. Gandhi remained convinced until the end of his life that since the two communities shared common civilisational, ethnic and other bonds, nothing substantial divided them save the British policy of 'divide and rule' and 'small' misunderstandings.' (Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 187)

Later the communalism that had been formally accepting of the national project of a unified India was to break down in the phase of 'extreme communalism' in the late thirties and forties. Professor Bipan Chandra outlines many reasons for this. He comments: 'As a consequence of the growth of nationalism and in particular, of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930-34, the Congress emerged as the dominant political force in the elections of 1937. Various political leaders of landlords and other interests suffered a drastic decline. Moreover...the youth as also the workers were increasingly turning to the Left, and the national movement as a whole was getting increasingly radicalised in its economic and political programme and policies. The *zamindars* and landlords - the *jagirdari* elements - finding that open defiance of landlord's interests was no longer feasible, now, by and large, switched over to communalism for their class

defence. This was not only true in UP and Bihar but also in Punjab and Bengal...Communalism also became, after 1937, the only political recourse of colonial authorities and their policy of divide and rule. This was because, by this time, nearly all the other divisions, antagonisms and divisive devices promoted and fostered earlier by the colonial authorities had been overcome by the national movement, and had become politically non-viable from the colonial point of view... The outbreak of the World War II, on 1 September, 1939 further strengthened the reliance on the communal card. The Congress withdrew its ministries and demanded that the British make a declaration that India would get complete freedom after the War...Both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha has run the election campaign of 1937 on liberal communal lines – they had incorporated much of the nationalist programme and many of the Congress policies, except those relating to agrarian issues, in their election manifestoes. But they had fared poorly in the elections. The Muslim League, for example, won only 109 out of the 482 seats allotted to Muslims...securing only 4.8% of the total Muslim votes. The Hindu Mahasabha fared even worse...The communalists now realised that they would gradually wither away if they did not take to militant, mass based politics.' (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp.430-31)

QUESTIONS

1. What were the main reasons for the growth of the communal divide between 1857 and 1947?
2. What were the various phases of this growth?

SUGGESTED READING

Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence*

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: WOMEN, CASTE, PEASANT, TRIBAL AND WORKERS

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- Women and the National Struggle
- The Movements of the Depressed Castes
- The Contribution of Peasant Movements
- The Movement of Tribals
- Worker's and Labour Movement

In the national struggle apart from the mainstream of the national movement carried on by the Congress and others there were various movements by or for population sub-groups all of which contributed to the national struggle. Their contribution apart from adding to the nationalist fervour and helping in putting up a more widespread opposition to foreign rule also helped create the national identity that we today take for granted.

Women and the National Struggle

One of the important facets of India's freedom movement was the growing participation of women. Women played an especially crucial role in the economic boycott campaigns and often participated in the non-cooperation movement with as much or even greater enthusiasm than their husbands or male relatives. In rallies organized by the Congress, women attended in large numbers often with little children in tow. Particularly notable was the participation of women in the armed struggle of Bengal. In the group led by Surya Sen, they provided shelter, acted as messengers and custodians of arms, and fought, guns in hand. Pritilata Waddadar died while conducting a raid, while Kalpana Dutt was arrested and tried along with Surya Sen and given a life sentence. In December 1931, two school girls of Comilla, Shanti Ghosh and Suniti Chowdhury, shot dead the District Magistrate. In February 1932, Bina Das fired point blank at the Governor while receiving her degree at the Convocation. When the entire Congress leadership was put in jail in 1942, women leaders like Aruna Asaf Ali and Sucheta Kripalani emerged with Achyut Patwardhan and Ram Manohar Lohia and others to lead the underground resistance. Usha Mehta ran the Congress radio. Congress socialists, Forward Bloc members, and other armed resistance factions were active in this period, working through underground cells in Mumbai, Pune, Satara, Baroda, and other parts of Gujarat, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, UP, Bihar and Delhi.

The journey for women's liberation though can be said to have started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1774), who in Bengal demanded that women be not regarded as weak in intellect and virtue or as deficient in resolution, trustworthiness and in terms of control over passion. He opposed *sati* and polygamy and started a campaign for widow-remarriage among his followers. He and his ardent supporters founded the *Brahmo Samaj* in 1828 and started imparting English education to both men and women to help change anti-woman attitudes. Devedra Nath Tagore (1817) and Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar (1820) supported the views of Ram Mohan. Keshab Chanda Sen was another reformer who tried to have kulinism and public dancing by women abolished. He also brought out a monthly magazine exclusively for women called 'Bamabodhini'.

and attacked polygamy and purdah while encouraging inter-caste marriages. He was the prime mover behind the movement that led to the passing of the Civil Marriage Act of 1872 by the British. Swami Vivekanada (1863) who came along later was also clear about the wrongful oppression of women on the basis of wrong and distorted interpretations of religious mores and customs. Rabindranath Tagore, the hugely influential poet and author also was supportive of the cause of advancement of women and recruited women for his institution Shantiniketan actively all his life.

In Uttar Pradesh, Huzur Maharaj Rai Salig Ram, born in 1829 in Agra was a social reformer who worked for the emancipation of women and could be said to be the pioneer of the women's movement in his part of the country. He opposed the custom of purdah and the traditional notion of servility of the wife towards the husband and worked for the removal of illiteracy among women. He also brought out a magazine called PremPatra towards this end.

In the South, in Madras, the social reformer Viresalingam worked for advancement of women through education and marriage reforms. Another reformer VenkataRatnam too encouraged female education.

A major development was the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1874 which widened the meaning of Streedhana in Hindu law enabling women to begin to inherit property and to retain the money which a woman might earn by dint of her artistic and literary skills.

A major role in the journey of Indian women historically has been played by Swami Dayananda Saraswati who came into the scene in the later half of the nineteenth century. The AryaSamaj advocated female education, widow remarriage, marriage by consent (like in Svyamavara) and started a movement for re-admission into Hindu society of those who had once been converted to other religions through the ritual they called 'Suddhi'. The Arya Samaj continues to be an active organisation to this day.

In Maharashtra reformer Mahadev Govind Ranade, who was born in 1842 founded the Indian Social Conference and supported the cause of women's advancement and emancipation. Another reformer Behramji Malabari (1835) worked hard to infant marriages and enforced widowhoods abolished. It was his efforts which led to the passing by the British of the Age of Consent Act of 1881 which raised the age of consent for marriages to 12 years. Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866) also was a social reformer and nationalist who opposed the seclusion of women and was deeply interested in the propagation of female education.

Apart from the reformers mentioned above who were initially all men, there were also some women who played a role in the forward march of women as a result of which, as Anjani Kant puts it women "themselves came to assume the responsibilities of their own cause and began to raise the demand for their proper place in society". (Source: Anjani Kant, *Women and the Law*, A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 2003, p.64) Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) for instance, in Maharashtra, exhorted women to abandon participation in child marriages, to educate themselves and to do away with the wrongs meted out to them.

She broadened her fight and took into purview the authority of the scriptures also. Again in Maharashtra, Ramabai Ranade (1862-1922) worked for the education of women and brought women out of the confines of homes or zenanas in the case of Muslim homes. She wanted to be united across all barriers of religion and caste and fight their common battles together against tradition and patriarchy. Anandibai Joshi (1865) who was a physician by profession, worked for

the abolishing of child marriages and for the provision of proper medical care, free from all superstitions. Francina Sorabjee worked for female education and established many schools for the purpose. Annie Jagannadhan and Rukmabai, both physicians by profession, challenged Indian traditionalism and devoted to the service of women. Madam Cama (1861-1936), Toru Datt (1856-1877) and Swapna Kumari Devi (1855-1932) were some other important personalities among others.

During the national freedom movement against the British, women's advancement got a huge boost not just due to the work of reformers and the legislative changes introduced by the British but also due to the express support of our major leaders. Gandhi for instance once said:

"To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not-greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our Being, the future is with women". Gandhi's clear opposition to child marriage and the treatment that widows received until then, particularly in Hindu society, hugely helped to make these issues mainstream and helped in putting it out to the masses with a moral authority and force which made its wide acceptance possible. He asked for widows to be given the right to remarry if they want and while condemning the system of purdah appealed to the parents of girls to be broadminded. He called the system of dowry a drag on society and ultimately held men responsible for the degradation of women. His role can't be underestimated. Anjali Kant rightly points out:

"It was Gandhi above all who was responsible for the creation of a new myth of Indian womanhood. He was well aware of the unrest and revolutionary potential among the masses of oppressed Indian women. Gandhi identified with the enslaved women and canalised their rebellion into his non-violent, anti-colonial struggle. The Gandhian ideology of "Indian womanhood" combined the female virtues which orthodox Hinduism preached for several thousand years with certain qualities of the modern women. Gandhi revived the figures of the Indian epics, the Mahabharata and above all, the Ramayana. Gandhi chose Sita – the monogamous, chaste, self-sacrificing spouse of Rama – as his ideal woman and not Draupadi the strong willed, passionate revengeful, poly-androus wife of the five Pandavas of the Mahabharata....Gandhi admired Sita's chastity and purity, which she preserved even when in the clutches of Ravana – the demon king. Gandhi utilised Sita's qualities to advise women that she could find sufficient strength in her own purity to resist even the physical violence of men. Gandhi adopted the technique of passive resistance or *Satyagraha*. In the silent suffering and self-sacrifice of women, Gandhi saw one of the strongest features of Indian women and it is that women are by nature more suited to fight with the new weapons of non-violence and truth. He thought that women are more non-violent than men. In 1938, he wrote, "I do believe that it is women's mission to exhibit ahimsa (non-violence) at its highest and its best....for women is more fitted than man to make ahimsa. For the courage of self-sacrificing woman is in any way superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute"Besides, or so to speak, above ahimsa and self-sacrifice, Gandhi allotted woman the role of spiritualization of the so-called animal instincts, including sexual desires. The highest aim of marriage for Gandhi was spiritual maturation, followed by service to the society, duties towards the family and ancestors, and mutual attraction between husband and wife. Following Sita-Ram model, the wife's relationship to her husband ought to be one of worship, a spiritual one. Having envisioned these qualities of women, Gandhi thought women's entry into the fields of politics, educations and economics will have a civilising effect: "Women is the embodiment of sacrifices and suffering, and her advent to public life should, therefore, result in purifying it, in restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property." Thus, Gandhi pleaded for equality and economic

Independence for women but advised them not to practice these rights, for they were fitted to the "brute nature" of man".... The national movement brought women from their homes to face lathis and bullets and gave them not only a consciousness of their own strength but a new vision of their true place in society. This had several implications for women. First, in the wake of the national movement, it became easier for women to leave their homes to get involved in the national cause as the movement was supported by their husbands and guardians. Secondly, women themselves became aware of their capacity for work, suffering, and leadership and organised themselves to fight for their due place both in the home and in the society. Thirdly, the nationalist movement further provided a suitable forum for women to assess their own work which began in the early part of the century with the creation of several women's organisations." (Source: *Ibid.* pp.64-67)

The significance of the national movement and women's participation in it has been held up by commentators again and again as a very significant shift. Take the following view for instance:

"The national movement by treating women as political beings capable of nationalist feelings and as, if not more, capable of struggle and sacrifice than men resolved many doctrinal debates about the desirability of women's role in the public sphere. If women could march in processions, defy the laws, go to jail – all unescorted by male family members – then they could also aspire to take up jobs, have the right to vote, and maybe even inherit parental property. Political participation by women in the massive popular struggles from the twenties onwards opened up new vistas of possibilities that a century of social reform could not. The image of the woman changed from a recipient of justice in the nineteenth century, to an ardent supporter of nationalist men in the early twentieth, to a comrade by the thirties and forties. Women had participated in all streams of national movement – from Gandhian to Socialist to Communist to revolutionary terrorist. They had been in peasant movements and in trade union struggles. They had founded separate women's organisations as well; the All India Women's Conference, founded in 1926, being the most important of these." (Source: *Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee's 'India after Independence, 1947-2000', Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000* Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000, p.451)

The Movements of the Depressed Castes

Another major population sub-group that saw major movements were the depressed classes also known as the backward castes or Dalits.

Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar emerged as amongst the most prominent of the Dalit leaders. The Congress, while open to some reforms, often did not go far enough - leading to well-deserved criticism from the more radical of the Dalit and Adivasi leaders. Nevertheless, virtually all the advanced sections of the freedom struggle came to the conclusion that for India to succeed as a modern nation, the issue of equality for Dalits and Adivasis could not be dismissed.

Gandhi realised that for the cause of forging a national identity and a national spirit the leadership will have to eliminate or dilute social divisions. And one of the worst divisions unique to India was the caste divide with untouchability as its ugliest manifestation. Thus as a matter of political strategy for the cause of the freedom struggle it was an urgency to fight the caste divide and eliminate untouchability. Also as a social reformer who believed the key to national regeneration was a rebuilding of the national character, particularly the Hindu character, he saw it as a vital imperative to eliminate the evils of caste and untouchability. Also as somebody who had it as one of his goals the spiritual revival of the Hindu religion, he came to see it vital and most urgent that untouchability be eliminated and the caste rigidities diluted.

Gandhi rather than leading a political movement of the backward castes instead chose the reformist approach as his main motive was not to right social wrongs but to unite India, particularly Hindus, for the struggle against the British. He commented in 1926 for instance: 'I do not believe in caste as it is at present constituted, but I do believe in the four fundamental divisions regulated according to the four principal occupations. The existing innumerable divisions, with the attendant artificial restrictions and elaborate ceremonial, are harmful to the growth of a religious spirit, as also to the social well-being of the Hindus and, therefore, also their neighbours.' (Source: *Young India*, Feb 25, 1926) It was Gandhi's case that the caste system had to be purified and corrected from the abusive and the distorted form it had taken. This was his position both because he wished to reform and save Hinduism from its degraded state and raise the character of the Hindu for the sake of both Hindus and the Indian national cause. Thus he was not suggesting abolishing of the caste system and was only pleading for a mitigation of its worst aspects.

He was careful not to give a political tinge to his appeals for correcting the wrongs against Dalits as that would have weakened the nationalist agenda. He commented: 'According to my conception of *Varna*, all inequality is ruled out of life. Inequality of intellect or in material possessions ought not to mean inequality of social status. I do most emphatically maintain that man is not made to choose his occupation for 'rising in the social scale'. He is made to serve his fellow-man and earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow. And since the primary wants of all are the same, all labour should carry the same value.' (Source: *Harijan*, March 11, 1933) Then again: 'The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower.' (Source: *Young India*, October 6, 1921)

While arguing for a reform of the caste system Gandhi was careful to explain he was not asking that they start eating together and inter-marrying. Perhaps he knew it would be realistically in a social and political sense too much to expect or perhaps he only wished to remove the really ugly edges of the system and had no real repulsion for a substantial portion of it, if it was suitably reformed. That is the reason the great leaders like Ambedkar came into conflict with him.

The case of the new leaders who emerged was that a '*class analysis*' of India (focusing attention on the rich, the new middle-class and the poor), was not enough and it was only a '*caste analysis*' of India that can fully deal with the reality of India with its unique history of social injustice. One cannot understand India without understanding the complete nature and scope of the caste system in Indian life. Caste considerations dominate people's lives from birth to death. This understanding of the caste system and how it controls and regulates social, economic, political and religious life is absolutely essential to interpreting the Indian reality.

Dalit and Backward Caste ideologues launched a full-fledged attack against the caste system and Brahminism maintaining and pushing forward the movement first launched by Mahatma Phule, fine-tuned by Periyar in the South, and finally polished by Ambedkar.

Jotirao Govindrao Phule was born in Satara district of Maharashtra in a family belonging to *mali* caste. He was regarded as very intelligent as a child and got the opportunity to attend the Scottish Mission's High School. He was influenced by western thinkers and in particular by Thomas Paine's book *Rights of Man* (1791). He developed an inspiration for fighting for justice and became a severe critic of the Indian caste system which was quite radical for his times as the

public acceptability of the caste system at that time was total. He argued that education of women and the lower castes was a vital priority in addressing social inequalities.

On 24 September 1874, Jotirao formed 'Satya Shodhak Samaj' (Society of Seekers of Truth) and became its first president and treasurer. The main objectives of the organisation was to liberate the Shudras and AtiShudras and to prevent their 'exploitation' by the upper caste like Brahmins. The Satya Shodhak Samaj refused to regard the Vedas as sacrosanct and opposed idolatry. He called the Vedas idle fantasies containing absurd legends and creating a 'form of false consciousness'. Satya Shodhak Samaj instead argued and promoted what they called rational thinking. Their argument was there was no need for a Brahmin caste for religious rituals or for imparting education. Phule's wife, Savitribai had become the head of the women's section which included ninety female members – again quite revolutionary for those times and without parallel anywhere in the country. The samaj had a journal *Deenbandhu* which played a very important role in spreading Satya Shodhak Samaj's message.

The Satya Shodhak Samaj under Phule led campaigns to remove the economic and social discriminations arguing the rules of religious texts were outwardly religious but in essence motivated by desire to exploit and maintain superior positions of the upper castes. He accused the Brahmins of upholding the teachings of religion but refusing to rationally analyse the principles. He rejected the blind faith out of fear of God that was the basis of the belief systems and social rules. He asked if there is only one God, who created the whole of mankind, why did he write the Vedas only in Sanskrit language despite his anxiety for the welfare of the whole mankind? What about the welfare of those who do not understand this language?" Phule thus argued it is wrong that religious texts were given by God and to believe so is only ignorance and prejudice. All religions and their religious texts are man-made and they represent the selfish interest of the classes, which are trying to pursue and protect their selfish ends is what he forcefully propagated and he was the only social reformer in his time to hold such ideas. Phule believed in overthrowing the social system in which man has been deliberately made dependent on others, illiterate, ignorant and poor, with a view to exploiting him. He initiated widow-remarriage and started a home for upper caste widows in 1854, as well as a home for new-born infants to prevent female infanticide. Phule tried to eliminate the stigma of untouchability surrounding the lower castes by opening his house and the use of his water-well to the members of the lower castes. Thus he was clearly a pioneer of the later social reform movements against caste discrimination including those by Gandhi during the national movement.

Most interestingly Phule had a favourable opinion about the effects of the British Rule in India as he felt they were introducing modern notions of justice and equality in Indian society and he became a member of Pune municipality from 1876 to 1882.

Even after Jotiba's death in 1890 his followers continued spreading the movement to the remotest parts of Maharashtra. Shahu Maharaj, the ruler of the Kolhapur princely state, interestingly had supported the Samaj and had given a lot of financial and moral support to Satya Shodhak Samaj, presumably in the face of opposition from his own caste fellows and the other upper castes. In its new incarnation party carried on the work of superstition removal vigorously.

Periyar was the pioneer of Dalit political movements in South India. At first Periyar Ramaswamy had joined the Indian National Congress in 1919 after quitting his business and resigning from all public posts under the British. He got elected to the Chairmanship of Erode Municipality in Tamil Nadu and led programs spreading the use of Khadi, for picketing alcoholic drink (toddy) shops, shops selling foreign cloth, and for eradicating untouchability. In 1921, Periyar was imprisoned for picketing toddy shops in Erode. He was again arrested during the

Non-Cooperation movement. In 1922 Periyar was elected the President of the Madras Presidency Congress Committee during the Tirupur session where he advocated strongly for reservation in government jobs and education for lower castes. His attempts were defeated by the other leaders in the Congress party and that was the reason Periyar quit the party on those grounds in 1925 as he felt the party was only serving the interests of the Brahmins. In 1924, Periyar had led a very successful non-violent agitation (satyagraha) in Vaikom, Kerala for promoting the rights of lower castes and had some disagreements with Gandhi as well. From 1929 to 1932 he toured Malaysia, Europe, and Russia, which had a deep influence on him and strengthened his resolve to fight for social justice for the depressed castes. In 1939, Periyar became the head of the Justice Party, and in 1944, he changed its name to Dravidar Kazhagam. The party later split and one group led by C. N. Annadurai formed the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in 1949. While continuing the Self-Respect Movement, he advocated for an independent Dravida Nadu (Dravidistan).

Ideologically Periyar advanced on the principles of rationalism and self-respect rights for women and eradication of the caste system. He said the non-Brahmin indigenous Dravidian peoples of South India had been exploited by the imposition of, what he called, Indo-Aryan India from the north.

The other major movement in which Periyar played a major role was the Self-Respect Movement. Whereas Periyar and his followers focussed on asking the government to take measures for removing social injustice against lower castes, other nationalist leaders focused on the general political struggle for independence and this was what distinguished Periyar's movements. The Self-Respect Movement was described from the beginning, as "dedicated to the goal of giving non-Brahmins a sense of pride based on their Dravidian past". Periyar argued for doing away with needless customs, meaningless ceremonies, and blind superstitious beliefs. He wanted to put an end to a social system in which caste, religion, community and traditional occupations based on the accident of birth was the deciding factor. He argued for eradicating untouchability and establishing a cohesive united society. He also propagated the rights of women and campaigned against child marriages. Quite revolutionary for his times he encouraged love marriages and widow marriages and also inter-caste and inter-religious marriages and to have the marriages registered under Civil Laws rather than religious ritualistic marriages. He established and maintained homes for orphans and widows and started many educational institutions.

Propagation of the philosophy of self respect became the full-time activity of Periyar since 1925. A Tamil weekly Kudi Arasu started in 1925, while the English journal Revolt started in 1928 carried on the propaganda among the English educated people. Periyar was the President of the Justice Party between 1938 and 1944 and the principal activity of the party was to oppose the economic and political power of the Brahmins. Brahmin priesthood and the Sanskritised culture were held by the Justice Party as responsible for existence of inequalities.

Another major cause of the movement was against Hindi.

Periyar spent over fifty years working towards educating the people through his speeches. He propagated the realization that everyone is an equal citizen and the differences on basis of caste and creeds were man-made to keep the innocent and ignorant as underdogs in the society. Although Periyar's speeches were targeted towards illiterate and more mundane mass, scores of educated people followed them. These educated elites earlier knew nothing about how a few were propagating blind beliefs and caste distinction for their own selfish ends.

Periyar's message to the subjugated non-brahmin castes of South India was that majority were trying to keep them in a subordinate position forever and he asked they should think about their position and rebel. Unless they exercised their reason, there wouldn't be a realization that they were being exploited by a handful of people. To the Brahmin community, Periyar had said "in the name of god, religion, and sastras you have duped us. We were the ruling people. Stop this life of cheating us from this year. Give room for rationalism and humanism". He had also said "any opposition not based on rationalism, science, or experience will one day or another, reveal the fraud, selfishness, lies and conspiracies".

The other great political influence was that of Ambedkar. Ambedkar wanted the abolishment of caste itself, which then would result in abolishing untouchability and the inhuman discrimination against the Dalits. So he disagreed with Gandhi who was working against untouchability while keeping the caste system intact. Gandhi's proposal to simply deal with the symptom of untouchability and not touch the root issue of the caste system was unacceptable to Ambedkar. Ambedkar had also concluded that conversion was the ultimate solution if Hinduism was not able to reform itself and annihilate caste. Ambedkar could become a powerful voice against the caste system because of the brilliance of his legal training and his access to the political negotiating tables in London and New Delhi in the days preceding the transfer of power from Britain to Independent India. He had argued (with the British) and won for the Dalits a separate seat at that table. Ambedkar born as a Dalit in Maharashtra had experienced caste's depravity first-hand. After he had many arguments with the Congress leadership and bitterly criticised Gandhi's approach of only dealing with untouchability while not advocating the abolishing of the caste system itself, he decided the Hindu faith must be abandoned by the Dalits and led thousands of Dalits into Buddhism.

Many analysis have argued substantially caste and class mean the same thing in India as it is basically the lower castes who were also the poorer classes. Hence perhaps it is not surprising many of the caste movements also contributed to the strengthening of the left trends as Sumit Sarkar points out. He writes: 'It is interesting that in all these ... militant lower caste movements contributed to the emergence of the Leftist trends. Sahajananda joined the Congress Socialists and then the Communists, while Nana Patil, who had participated in the Satya Shodhak movement in Satara in 1919-21, headed the 1942 parallel government there and later became Maharashtra's best known Communist peasant leader. Early Tamil Communists like Singaravelu and P. Jeevanandan cooperated with Periyar for a time in the early 1930s, and Aiyappan and Kesavan set many Ezhavas in Kerala on the road leading to the Communist Party even though they never joined it themselves.' (Source: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 244)

The Contribution of Peasant Movements

The Indian peasantry it may be argued really rose for the first time in protest during the 1857 revolt, tired and exhausted with the high land revenue taxes imposed by the British which was breaking their back. That revolt is not seen as a peasant revolt as farmers were not the only people who revolted nor land revenue the only reason but that was one of the major issues underlying the upsurge.

The farmers in India rose against two kinds of exploitation – one from the *zamindars* and *jagirdars* and the other from the British. The Kisan Sabha movement started in Bihar under the leadership of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati who had formed in 1929 the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha (BPKS) in order to mobilise peasants against the exploitation of zamindars who on flimsy

pretexts usurped the land occupancy rights of farmers. Gradually the peasant movement intensified and spread across the rest of India. There were also farmer movements in 1907 under the leadership of Sardar Ajit Singh.

The final phase of the Indian freedom struggle also saw peasant struggles rising to new heights of militancy. Throughout the country, KisanSabhas had been active in the 1930s. After the Quit-India call, peasants of all classes joined in the freedom struggle in Eastern UP, Bihar, Midnapur in Bengal, Satara in Maharashtra, and also in Andhra, Gujarat and Kerala. Even some of the Zamindars (landlords) joined in. The Raja of Darbhanga was one of the most supportive of the resisting peasants. Adivasis and landless peasants were particularly heroic in their struggles. Crushed by the inhumane demands of the Zamindari system, they had to fight a dual war - one against the British and the other against the Indian landlords who collaborated with British rule. Amongst the most significant of these struggles were those of Tebhaga, PunnapraVayalar, the Worliadivasis and above all the historic Telanganapeasants armed struggle which was directed against the Nizam of Hyderabad who had collaborated with the British.

The Kisan Sabhas was initially the main articulating vehicle for peasant demands. As the *zamindari* influence over Congress was quite strong and the peasants were not seeing the Congress take up their particular and specific concerns, they drifted away later. SumitSarkar points out: 'Disillusioned by the repeated Congress failure to unequivocally take up their demands, some peasant activists by mid 20s had started groping towards new ideologies. In 1922 Swami Vidyanand raised the demand for abolition of *zamindari*, and Baba Ramchandra in November 1925 referred to Lenin as 'the dear leader of the kisans....the peasants are still slaves except in Russia'...The strong links of the Congressmen - whether Swarajists or No-Changers - with the *zamindari* or intermediate tenure-holding made it generally unresponsive to peasant demands for rent-reduction and share cropper efforts at a fairer division of the harvest in Bengal, Bihar and U.P. This was clearest and ultimately most disastrous in Bengal, a province where share-cropping (*Barga*) was rapidly spreading in the 1920s. The Swarajists here bitterly opposed any proposal to give tenancy status to *bargadars*, and showed no sympathy at all for a number of Namasudra and Muslim *bargadari* movements in the mid 20s in districtslike Mymensingh, Dacca, Pabna, Khulna and Nadia. The U.P. Congress did take up a slightly more pro-peasant stance, and in 1924 started a U.P. KisanSangh to pressurise the government into modifying some pro-*zamindar* clauses in a tenancy amendment bill then being discussed for Agra province. It was made clear, however, that 'the policy of the Sangha has been not to antagonise the *zamindars* by saying even one word against them, but to attack the government in whose hands the *zamindars* are blindly playing'. (AICC, F.N. 23/1924)...The one peasantgrievance about which the Congress was generally unequivocal was revenue enhancement in *ryotwari* areas. Enhancement was resisted with some success in Tanjore in 1923-24, with its prosperous *mirasdars*. In coastal Andhra N.G. Ranga started work among the upper stratum of the peasantry in 1923, founding the first Ryot's Association in Guntur in that year. The British bid in 1927 to enhance revenue by 18 per cent in the Krishna Godavari delta led to a powerful *kisan*movement in coastal Andhra...'. (Source: Suimitsarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 241-242)

Mahatma Gandhi had led two very successful revolts - one against the taxation and allied landlords in Champaran, Bihar, and another in Kheda, Gujarat. Success in both struggles had shown the farmers that economic and civil rights could be won if movements were lauched and carried with determination. In 1920, the Indian National Congress under Gandhi's leadership launched the Non-Cooperation Movement and there was peasant participation. The Bardoli Satyagraha of 1925 in the state of Gujarat was almost entirely a peasant uprising. In 1925, the taluka of Bardoli in Gujarat suffered from floods and famine, which hurt the crop produce,

leaving farmers facing great financial troubles. Still the government raised the tax rate by 30% that year, and despite many petitions from civic groups, refused to cancel the increase. The situation was very such that the farmers barely had enough property and crops to pay-off the tax and would most certainly have faced starvation. Leaders like activists Narhari Parikh, Ravi Shankar Vyas and Mohanlal Pandya talked to village chieftains and farmers, and solicited the help of Vallabhbhai Patel. Patel had previously led Gujarat's farmers during the Kheda struggle. Patel and Gandhi decided that the struggle should be left entirely to the people of Bardolitaluka. The Governor of Bombay ignored the requests made by Patel to reduce the taxes and instead announced the date of collection. Patel instructed all the farmers of Bardoli to refuse payment. Patel had instructed the farmers to remain completely non-violent, and not respond physically to any incitements or aggressive actions from officials. He reassured them that the struggle would not end until not only the cancellation of all taxes for the year, but also when all the seized property and lands were returned to rightful owners. The Government declared its intention to crush the revolt and along with tax inspectors forcibly took all property, including cattle. The government then began auctioning the houses and the lands but not a single man from Gujarat or anywhere else in India came forward to buy them. Patel had appointed volunteers in every village to keep watch and as soon as officials were sighted who were coming to auction the property, the volunteers would sound bugles and the farmers would leave the village and hide in the jungles. The officials would then find the entire village empty and could not determine who owned a particular house. The movement was successful and in 1928, an agreement was finally brokered by a Parsi member of the Bombay government and the Government agreed to return the confiscated lands and properties, as well as cancel revenue payment not only for that year, but also cancelled the 30% increase.

Later the various peasant revolts under different umbrellas culminated in the formation of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in April 1936 with Swami Sahajanand Saraswati elected as its first President.

The closing years of the British rule there were two spectacular peasant struggles - The Tebhaga movement in Bengal and the Telangana movement in Andhra.

The Tebhaga started as a campaign initiated in Bengal by the Kisan Sabha (peasants front of Communist Party of India) in 1946. At that time share-cropping peasants (essentially, tenants) had to give half of their harvest to the owners of the land. The demand of the Tebhaga (sharing by thirds) movement was to reduce the share given to landlords to one third. In many areas the agitations turned violent, and landlords fled villages leaving parts of the countryside in the hands of the Kisan Sabha. Thus it has become almost like an overthrow of the zamindari class by the exploited peasant classes. As a response to the agitations, the then Muslim League ministry in the province launched the Bargadar Act, which provided that the share of the harvest given to the landlords would be limited to one third of the total. But the law was not fully implemented. The former Chief Minister of West Bengal comments thus on the Tebhaga movement: "The farmers waited for years. When it was realised that the Bill was only a pipedream, it was then decided that the Tebhaga demand would have to take an agitational route. After the Second World War, the farmers took to active struggle. The movement was already taking place in bits and starts in many districts. However in the beginning of 1947, it took the form of an organised movement throughout the State particularly in North Bengal. There was a general awakening in places like Mymensingh, Jalpaiguri, Jessore, Khulna, Rangpur, Dinajpur and 24-parganas. The catchword that went around was; "We want Tebhaga. We will give our lives but not our crop" With law and order being the easiest excuse, the Police went on torturing the farmers; firing and lathi

charges on peaceful gatherings were the order of the day....In the early part of 1947, I moved extensively in Mymensingh, Khulna and Jalpaiguri. My report was as an eyewitness....At least 70 farmers had died because of unjustified police firing,...There was arson by the Police. Even women were not spared....But this sort of atrocities could not stop the progress of the movement. The movement went ahead even though the police torture grew.” (Source: Jyoti Basu, *Memoirs*)

The Telangana Rebellion was a Communist led peasant revolt that took place in the former princely state of Hyderabad between 1946 and 1951 and was led by the Communist Party of India. Peasants revolted against the Nizam and local feudal landlords (jagirdars and deshmukhs) who owed allegiance to him and exploited the farmers by turning them into bonded labour. The peasants also demanded writing off of all the debts of the peasants that were not genuine real but manipulated and shown falsely by the feudal lords. The movement was an armed struggle and the peasants declared independence after major successes. They were ultimately defeated only after the central government sent in the army.

The Movement of Tribals

Another population sub group that revolted and carried on movements during the British era contributing to the national struggle were tribals. Sumit Sarkar has rightly commented: ‘As in earlier or later periods, the most militant outbreaks tended to be of tribal communities, which, in the words of a recent scholar, ‘revolted more often and far more violently than any other community including peasants in India’. (K. Suresh Singh) The term ‘tribe’ is used to distinguish people so socially organised from ‘caste’ and should not convey a sense of complete isolation from the mainstream of Indian life. Actually, apart from some isolated and really primitive food-gatherers, the tribals were and are very much a part of Indian society as the lowest strata of peasantry subsisting through shifting cultivation, agricultural labourers, and increasingly, coolies recruited for work in distant plantations, mines and factories. British rule and its accompanying commercialisation strengthened already present tendencies towards penetration of tribal areas by outsiders from the plains – money lenders, traders, land-grabbers, and contractors, the *dikus* so hated by the Santhals. British legal conceptions of absolute private property eroded traditions of joint ownership (like the *khuntkatti* tenure in Chota Nagpur) and sharpened tensions within tribal society...A new but increasingly important factor from the 1870s and 80s was the tightening of control by the colonial state over forest zones for revenue purposes. Shifting cultivation – which required no plough animals and therefore was often essential for the survival of the poorest in rural society – was banned or restricted in the ‘reserved’ forests from 1867 onwards, and attempts were made to monopolise forest wealth through curbs on use of timber and grazing facilities...The tribal response included, as before, occasional violent outbursts, but also movements of internal religious and socio-cultural reform. Such movements of ‘revitalisation’, borrowing elements from Christianity or Hinduism and promising a sudden miraculous entry into a golden age, became increasingly typical in the period 1860-1920, generally following in the wake of defeated uprisings under traditional chiefs. Thus the Santhal Rebellion (1855) was followed by the Kherwar or SaphaHar movement of the 1870s, which preached monotheism and internal social reform at first but had begun to turn into a campaign against revenue settlement operations just before it was suppressed.’ (Source: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 44-45)

There were various scattered revolts under different inspirations from time to time. In 1868 the Naikda forest tribe attacked police stations in a bid to establish a *dharm-raj*. In 1882 the Kacha Nagas of Cachar attacked the whites inspired by a miracle worker called Sambhudan who claimed magical powers which would make his followers immune to bullets. Similarly in 1900

there was a revolt by Konda Doras when a tribesman KorraMallaya claimed he was a re-incarnation of the pndavas and could drive out the British and gathered round him an inspired crowd of four to five thousand people. They were suppressed by the British with eleven of them shot dead and sixty put on trial and two hanged. There was a massive rebellion in 1879-80 by the Konda Dora and Koyatribals when their chiefs rose against their overlord (a *mansabdar* family) when he tried to raise taxes.

One of the most dramatic rebellions was by the *Ulgulan* (Great Tumult) under the leadership of BirsaMunda in 1899-1900 in the Ranchi region. The Munda tribes had seen over some time in the nineteenth century their traditional *khuntkatti* land system (joint holdings by *khunts* or tribal lineages) being replaced by the rule of *jagirdars* and *thinkadars* coming from the northern plains as money lenders and merchants.

Birsa's own experience as a young boy, driven from place to place in search of employment, given him an insight into the fate of his people and forest matters. He was very intelligent and always an active participant in the movements going on in the neighbourhood. Later in life he claimed to be a messenger of God and founded a kind of new sect and within his sect converts from Christianity, mostly Sardars. His simple message was against the church which levied a tax. He laid down new rules which saved some expense of sacrifices and a strict code of conduct was laid down: theft, lying and murder were declared bad and begging was prohibited. The stories of Birsa as a healer, a miracle man, and a preacher spread. The Mundas, Oraons, and Kharias flocked to Chalkad to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. The British colonial system as mentioned above had started causing a transformation of the tribal agrarian system into a feudal one dominated by *jagirdars*. As the tribals with their primitive technology could not generate a surplus, non-tribal peasantry were invited by the chiefs in Chhotanagpur to settle on and cultivate the land. This led to the tribals losing their lands and that built up resentment. In 1856 the number of the Jagirdars stood at about 600 and by 1874, the authority of the old Munda or Oraon chiefs had been almost entirely ended by the new landlords. In some villages the tribals had lost all their land rights, and had been reduced to being labourers. So naturally because of the agrarian breakdown and the forced cultural changes the tribals had responded with a series of revolts and uprisings under his Birsa's leadership. The movement sought to gain back the land of the Mundas and throw out the middlemen and the British. Ultimately however even though the struggle was brave and achieved some initial successes against the authorities Birsa was treacherously caught on 3 February 1900 and he died under mysterious conditions on 9 June 1900 in Ranchi Jail. Though he lived a very short life of only 25 years he mobilised the tribals like never before and taught them to think about their conditions and for a short time became a terror to the British rulers.

Workers and Labour Movement

The workers and labourers who worked in the urban industrial centres came from villages as a result of the collapse of the agrarian economy and the end of the handicrafts. The low wages and unimaginable living conditions of the workers enabled the capitalists whether British or foreign to pile up huge profits which were often many times the invested capital often even. It was inevitable that people living in such conditions would rise and revolt. As R.P. Dutt puts it: 'This is the background of the Indian Labour Movement. It is to the millions living in these conditions that Socialism and Trade Union have brought for the power of combination, and the first vision of a goal which can end their misery.' (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 402)

It is not clear when exactly strikes began as a form of protest but there is record of strikes in 1877 at the Empress Mills at Nagpur over wage rates. In the period 1882 and 1890 there were twenty-five strikes in the Bombay and Madras presidencies.

There was a meeting of Bombay mill workers in 1884 called by a local journalist and editor, N.M. Lokhande, who drew up a list of demands for limitation of hours of work, a weekly rest day, a noontime recess and compensation for injuries, to present to the Factories Commission as the demands of the Bombay workers. Lokhande started calling his organisation of workers the 'Bombay Millhands Association' and called himself the President. He also started a journal *Dinabandhu* or *Friend of the Poor*. Lokhande was an educated intellectual of sorts and was a great philanthropic promoter of the causes of labourers but his organisation was not really a trade union. It had no membership, no funds and no rules. He basically acted as a well meaning advisor to workers who came to him with their problems. He had also once served in the government's Factories Commission.

Even though there was no organised trade union as such, there continued throughout workers spontaneous agitations every now and then. There was a strike in the famous Budge Budge Jute Mills in 1895 and also a strike by workers in Ahmedabad textile industry. The level of gradual worker consolidation can be judged from the following account of the situation:

'Despite almost universal testimony before Commissions between 1880 and 1908 to the effect that there were no actual unions, many stated that the labourers in an individual mill were often able to act in unison and that, as a group, they were very independent. The inspector of boilers spoke in 1892 of 'an unnamed and unwritten bond of union among the workers peculiar to the people': and the Collector of Bombay wrote that although this was little more than in the air' it it was 'powerful'. 'I believe' he wrote to the Government, 'it has had much to do with the prolonged maintenance of what seems to be a monopoly or almost a monopoly wage.' Sir David Sassoon said in 1908 that if labour 'had no proper organisation, they had an understanding among themselves'. Mr. Barucha, lately Director of Industries in Bombay Presidency, stated that 'the mill hands were all powerful against the owners, and could combine, though they had not got a trade union''(Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 402)

So R.P. Dutt concludes although 'there was not yet any organisation, it would be a mistake to under estimate the growth of solidarity in action and elementary class-consciousness of the Indian industrial workers during the decades preceding 1914'.(Source: *Ibid.* p.403)

From 1905 onwards an interesting thing began to happen by way of a huge advance of worker mobilisation. The national movement, which was coming under the influence of the extremists and as a consequence becoming a lot more militant, found in the working class a huge usable pool of willing and courageous agitators. The Swadeshi leaders realised the power of organising labour into a movement, which could then advance the cause of the freedom struggle. So they showed great enthusiasm in organising stable trade unions or trade union like groups, strikes, legal aid to workers and fund collection drives. Public meetings were organised in support of striking workers and were addressed by leaders of the stature of B.C. Pal, C.R. Das and Liaquat Hussain. The most energetic of the Swadeshi leaders working for the rights of workers and involved in supporting them were Ashwinicoomar Banerji, Prabhat Kumar Roy Chowdhuri, Premtosh Bose and Apurba Kumar Ghose. They were very successful in organising workers in the Government Press, Railways and the jute industry – all areas were either foreign capitalists or the government rather than Indian capitalists were the controlling/owning authorities.

How much the labour movement and the national movement had converged can be gauged from for instance the hugely successful six-day political strike populated mainly by the industrial working class in 1908 against Tilak's imprisonment. Yet workers were too uneducated and mired in poverty and illiteracy to be able to organise themselves into trade unions but fortunately every now and then and here and there throughout the length and breadth of the country philanthropic individuals kept coming forward to lend a helping hand to the workers. In 1910 for instance, a 'KamgarHitavardhakSabha' was formed by some well meaning social workers and philanthropists in Bombay to aid workers.

The years of the first world war and the immediate post war years including the years following the communist revolution in Russia were to prove the most eventful in the advance of the trade union movement. The reasons were both economic and political for this spurt in activity. Economically, in conditions of a constant increase (even doubling) in the prices of essentials without a corresponding increase in the wages on the one hand there was fantastic profiteering by the capitalists, both foreign and Indian on the other. Politically, extremists were already popular and there was even the early beginnings of revolutionary terrorism along with Congress-Muslim League unity and the first demands of immediate self-government. All of this enabled a wave of revolutionary militant fervour which useful for the development of the labour movement.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and its implications as it dawned on the intelligentsia leading the labour class and the workers themselves created a surge of enthusiasm and hope. The hope was that if common people in Russia – workers, peasants and the intelligentsia – could unite and overthrow the mighty Czarist empire and establish a social order where there was no exploitation of one human being by another, then perhaps the Indian people could also do so. Socialist doctrines, particularly Marxism, the guiding theory of the Bolshevik Party, acquired a sudden attraction. B.C. Pal, the extremist leader wrote in 1919 that '...after the downfall of the Czar, there has grown up all over the world a new power, the power of the people determined to rescue their legitimate rights – the right to live freely and happily without being exploited and victimised by the wealthier and the so called higher classes'. (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *'India's struggle for Independence'*, Penguin Books, 1989, p.297)

A huge strike wave started in 1918, which swept the country throughout 1919 and 1920. There were massive and repeated strikes by workers in all the industrial centres – Bombay, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Madras etc and both workers of government facilities and industries owned by capitalists saw strike action. A strike that started in the Bombay cotton mills towards the end of 1918 saw by the January 1919, 125000 workers participating in it and gradually all the workers of the industry joined the strike. It was in the response of the working class to the agitation against the Rowlatt Act which demonstrated the political role of the workers in the national struggle very prominently. In the first six months of 1920, there were 200 strikes involving 15 lakh workers.

In 1918, the first organised Indian trade union with membership lists and subscriptions, the Madras Labour Union, was started by two young men, G. Ramanajulu Naidu and G. ChelvapathiChetti, connected with Annie Besant's movement in Madras and was presided over by B.P. Wadia, Besant's colleague. There were 125 unions with a membership 250000 by 1920. Even though the emergence of a trade union movement was the best thing that could have

happened to the cause of the Indian working class for the times, there were nevertheless some deficiencies in terms of ideology and character. R. P. Dutt comments on it as follows:

'Unions were formed by the score during this period. Many were essentially strike committees, springing up in the conditions of an immediate struggle, but without staying power. While the workers were ready for struggle the facilities for office organisation were inevitably in other hands. Hence arose the contradictions of the early Indian labour movement. There was not yet any political movement on the basis of socialism, of the conceptions of the working class and the class struggle. In consequence, the so-called "outsiders" or helpers from other class elements who came forward, for varying reasons, to give their assistance in the work of organisation, and whose assistance was in fact indispensable in this initial period, came without understanding of the aims and needs of the labour movement, and brought with them the conceptions of middle class politics. Whether their aims were philanthropic, as in some cases, careerist, as in others, or actuated by devotion to the national political struggle, as in others, they brought with them an alien outlook, and were incapable of guiding the young working class movement on the basis of the class struggle which the workers were in fact waging. This misfortune long dogged the Indian labour movement, seriously hampering the splendid militancy and heroism of the workers: and its influence still remains.' (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 406)

But R.P. Dutt also says this was the period amidst the strike waves of this period and the militant approach which created the conditions for the birth of the modern Indian labour movement. (Source: *ibid.*)

In 1920 the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) was founded as a sort of federation of Indian trade unions. The inaugural session was held in Bombay in 1920 and the extremist leader Lajpat Rai became the President and Joseph Baptista the Vice President. The immediate impetus for starting the congress may have been to nominate a representative for the International Labour Congress at Geneva. The founders of the Congress were motivated by the Washington Labour Conference and had felt that it would be helpful to develop a unified voice of the labour movement not only in India but also worldwide. The other aims were undertaking welfare measures, lobbying for legislation for workers with the imperial British government, moral and social improvement of workers and in the whole working without provoking class conflict which many of the leaders felt would at that juncture weaken the national movement. Gandhi, possibly anxious that a class conflict would break out between the exploited working class and the capitalist class, whether Indian or British, had gone so far as to start his own trade union movement, the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association in 1918 with a separatist slant from the movements in the rest of the country. He propounded his 'Trusteeship' principle and declared that owners and capitalists should behave like trustees or philanthropic managers of the industries they control. That the interests of the capitalists and the workers were directly against each other was something he wished to be brushed aside and instead wanted everybody to perform and function at high moral level of character and generosity to which he himself could have and did confirm. The Marxist view of Gandhi's position is that it was essentially *de facto* class collaborationist and against the interests of the workers as the capitalist with his axiomatic focus on profits could never be a trustee of worker's interests. He was being asked to perform a contradictory set of roles thereby. To be fair to Gandhi, he did ask the workers to perform *Satyagraha* and assert their rights if the owners did not take care of them but on the whole his approach had a 'restraining role' against the pressure for militancy which was coming 'from below' as Sumit Sarkar puts it. (Source: Sumit Sarkar, 'Modern India', Macmillan, New Delhi, 1983, p.176) He comments thus: 'In general, however, as in Bombay in January 1919, the pressure for militancy

came from below rather than from these early unions which played a restraining role. The early middle-class union leaders were at best inspired by nationalism, but often were quite loyalist in their politics, like N.M. Joshi in Bombay or K.C. Roychaudhuri in Calcutta. The restraining role was most unequivocal in the Gandhian Textile Labour Association (Majoor Mahajan) of Ahmedabad, but Wadia, too, opposed a strike in Binny's in July 1918 on the ground that soldiers (fighting for the British) needed uniforms'. (Source: *ibid.*) He further points out as follows how strikes were not the only form of protest of the rising exploited militant industrial working class: 'Strikes were only one form of expression of acute popular distress and discontent caused by factors like prices, a poor harvest and scarcity conditions over much of the country in 1918-1919, the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919, and artisan unemployment (handloom cotton production.....touched an all time low in 1919-20). A more elemental form was that of food riots; the looting of small-town markets and city grain shops. And the seizure of debt-bonds. 115 grain shops were looted in the Bombay mill area in the food riots of early 1918, while the account books of Marwaris were seized by railwaymen. There were food riots in the Krishna-Godavari delta region in May 1918, followed by three days of intensive riots in Madras city in September in which textile and railway workers played an important part. In Bengal 38 *hat* looting cases with 859 convictions were reported from Noakhali, Chittagong, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Khulna, 24 Parganas and Jessore districts in 1919-20'.

Upto 1927, says R.P. Dutt, the AITUC had a very limited practical connection with the working class struggle, but a new dawn started to break from this time onwards for the workers movement. (Source: R.P. Dutt, 'India Today', Manishi Publishers, Calcutta, 1970, p. 409) This happened with the rise of the left in Indian politics and the communist movement and the new left turn that a new generation of leaders began to give to the national movement particularly within the Congress.

There were other developments that were significant. In November 1, 1925 the Workers' and Peasants Party was founded in Bengal. Soon many branches of this organization started spreading in other parts of India. Finally in December 1928, through an India-wide convention in Kolkata, the All India Workers and Peasant Party was born.

The historic all-India Post and Telegraph workers' strike started from July 11, 1946 and in support to these strikes the common people had come forward. The city of Calcutta had become absolutely paralysed when a virtual general strike was called to extend support to the striking workers.

1947 was a very successful year in the workers movement and witnessed about 1811.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the role of the women in the national struggle?
2. What were the major peasant revolts?
3. Why and how the tribal populations revolted against the British?
4. Discuss caste based social justice movements during the national struggle?
5. Explain the rise and growth of labour and worker movements during the freedom struggle?

SUGGESTED READING

1. R.P. Dutt, *India Today*

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT OF DECOLONISATION

.....Amaresh Ganguli
Zakir Hussain College
University of Delhi

Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The Second World War
- The Quit India Movement
- The Indian National Army (INA)
- The Royal India Navy (RIN) revolt

There is much debate on why exactly the British agreed to eventually grant India independence. The British said they left because they had completed their mission in India. But the truth is the consequences of the Second World War on Britain's capacity to hold on to India had been severely debilitated. They had lost a major part of their military strength in the war and were financially much out of shape. Hence the public opinion in England was also not in favour of holding on to India particularly because it would mean moving large quantity of forces to India as the situation in India had gone out of controlling the face of the hugely successful Quit India Movement of 1942. But what really alarmed the British was the war launched by the Indian National Army (INA) and the revolt or mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy (RIN). This gave a signal to the British that a nation-wide armed revolt or upsurge was a real possibility and in case the British were routed in such an upsurge that would be a humiliating exit. It would be much better hence to honourably exit while still in control. Also the armed rebellions were being launched by forces prominently among whom were the leftists and even the communists. Naturally therefore the British were much alarmed.

Thus it is important to understand the impact of the Second World War, the Quit India Movement, The Indian National army (INA) and the Royal India Navy (RIN) mutiny all of which shook the pillar of the Raj in India. By early 1946 Britain openly adopted a political dialogue with the Indian National Congress to prepare for the eventual transfer of power and on August 15, 1947, India was declared independent.

The Second World War

When The Second World War started the Viceroy unilaterally without consulting Indian opinion pledged India's support to the British war effort. Even though the Congress had always in strong terms opposed the fascist forces, the Congress rightly put forth the suggestion that they would whole heartedly help in the war effort if the British agreed to the minimum demand that after the war there would be a constituent assembly for a free India and the government at the centre would begin to function as a genuine responsible government. The congress rightly argued that the allied were projecting the war as one between democracy and the principle of self-determination of nations against tyranny and aggression (of the fascists) but if they themselves don't follow the same principles and grant the same to Indians their claims would sound hollow and Indians would not be able to cooperate with them. But the British were not amenable to such demands particularly after a conservative party government took over in London under the Prime Minister-ship of Winston Churchill, who took over as the head of the national coalition in May

1940. But two developments in the year 1941 transformed the situation and forced the hand of the British. The Germans launched a massive invasion of Russia and succeeded in capturing large territories. The Japanese similarly launched an invasion of South East Asia and swept the British out of Malaya, Singapore and Burma and threatened to next turn towards India and bring down the British Empire. The British were suddenly very alarmed and realised the full-fledged support of the Indian people would be needed and hence decided to make apolitical gesture to assure Indians that they were serious about considering granting Indians independence after the war. There was also pressure on Britain even from international opinion with US President Roosevelt raising the issue with Churchill. So the Cripps Mission was sent in 1942 to engage in talks with Indian leaders.

The purpose of the mission was to negotiate with the Indian National Congress to obtain total co-operation during the war, in return for progressive devolution and distribution of power from the Crown and the Viceroy to an elected Indian legislature. But, the talks failed because it did not address the main demands of a time frame for self-government with a clear commitment as to the powers to be relinquished by the British. The British were only ready to offer limited dominion-status which was unacceptable to the Indian leadership.

It should be remembered the Cripps Mission had come at a time when the Indian business class were making huge profits by supplying materials to the British for the war and hence were not in favour of the Congress making their position difficult by doing anything which would disturb the profit opportunities. But the mass of the people were suffering great misery of the sort rarely seen before. There was a terrible famine in Bengal in 1943. There was massive food price inflation and shortages of essential food commodities leading to famines. Also the war had made many people working outside unemployed particularly in South East Asia. There was also black marketeering and massive corruption. So the masses were verywilling under the circumstances that they faced to listen to calls for a militant movement and show urgency.

Quit India Movement

Therefore when Gandhi gave the call for a militant but non-violent movement with a do-or-die approach in the summer of 1942 the people were ready to respond. The methods adopted were the usual Gandhian methods like boycott of courts and schools, salt satyagraha, picketing of foreign liquor and clothes etc. On July 14, 1942, the Indian National Congress passed a resolution demanding complete independence from Britain and massive civil disobedience. On August 8, 1942, the Quit India Resolution was passed at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC). In a speech entitled, "Do or Die," given on August 8, 1942, Gandhi urged the masses to act as an independent nation and not to follow the orders of the British. His call found support among a large number of Indians, including revolutionaries who did not subscribe to the philosophy of non-violence. The British responded immediately and massively and almost the entire Congress leadership, both at the national and local levels, was put into confinement less than twenty-four hours after Gandhi's speech, and the greater number of the Congress leaders spent the rest of the war in jail. Despite lack of direct leadership remarkably large-scale protests and demonstrations were held all over the country. The British responded with mass detentions, making over 100,000 arrests.

Not all leaders within the party were in support of a mass movement at that stage. Rajgopalachari quit the Congress over this decision and both Jawaharlal Nehru and Maulana Azad were apprehensive and critical of the call, but backed it and followed Gandhi's leadership. Patel and

Dr. Rajendra Prasad were openly and enthusiastically in favour as were the Gandhians and socialists like Asoka Mehta and Jaya Prakash Narayan. Hindu Mahasabha opposed the call and Muhammad Ali Jinnah's opposition to the call led to large numbers of Muslims cooperating with the British, and the Muslim League gaining in return in the provincial governments.

On August 8, 1942, the Quit India Resolution was passed at the Bombay session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) at the Gowalia Tank Maidan in Bombay, since re-named August KrantiMaidan (August Revolution Ground) in memory of the movement and Gandhi addressed the collected huge crowds to follow non-violent civil disobedience.

All the members of the Congress Party's Working Committee (national leadership) were arrested and imprisoned at the Ahmednagar Fort and the Congress party was banned which only had the effect of increasing the mass following for the movement. The working class was drawn into the movement and remained absent from factories. But the movement did not always stay non-violent and at some places bombs were exploded, government buildings were set on fire, electricity cut, and transport and communication lines disrupted. The nation was in short brought to a halt. There was unprecedented nationwide response of the sort never seen before.

The British at first swiftly responded with mass detentions and a total of over 100,000 arrests were made, mass fines were levied, and demonstrators were subjected to public flogging even. Hundreds of demonstrators and other innocent passer byes were killed in police and army firing. Many national leaders went underground and continued their struggle by broadcasting messages over clandestine radio stations, distributing pamphlets, and establishing parallel governments.

The British had panicked so much that they had even made provisions for a ship if necessary to take Gandhi and the Congress leaders out of India. The entire Congress leadership was cut off from the rest of the world for over three years. Gandhi went on a 21-day fast and maintained his decision to continue his resistance. Although the British released Gandhi on account of his failing health in 1944, Gandhi kept up the resistance, demanding the complete release of the Congress leadership.

By early 1944 the situation had quietened down while the entire Congress leadership was in jail. Some wanted to argue the movement had failed and Jinnah and the Muslim League, as well as other Congress opponents took the opportunity to attack Gandhi and the Congress.

However much it might have disconcerted the Raj, the movement may be deemed to have ultimately failed in its aim of forcing the British to negotiate an immediate transfer of power. One major underlying reason was the loyalty of the army.

The 1942 rebellion put a huge strain on the economic and military resources of the British Empire at a time when they were engaged in fighting the Second World War. Also the Indian population as a whole had been motivated and filled with a resolve, like it had never been before, to demand that independence was a non-negotiable goal.

The involvement of urban labouring classes was very minimal but as Sumit Sarkar points out: 'Unlike in the Civil Disobedience Movement days, middle class students were very much in the forefront in 1942, whether in urban clashes, as organisers of sabotage, or inspirers of peasant rebellion. What made the August movement so formidable, however, was the massive upsurge of the peasantry in certain areas...' (Source: Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 397)

There were three phases broadly in the movement. The first phase which was most massive and widespread was quickly suppressed by the British with brute force and by putting in jail the most important leaders. There were mainly urban *hartals* and strikes in this phase and clashes with the police with the police and the army frequently firing on the crowds killing people. From the

middle of August 1942 however the most important actions were in the countryside with students being most active who disrupted communication lines. The peasantry rebelled against authority. The government responded with massive force using no less than 57 army battalions and from the end of September the movement entered its longest but least formidable phase. There were hit and run style terrorist strikes on communication lines and the police and military installations. While such actions often were heroic, according to Sumit Sarkar, '... such activities, however, were no longer very much of a threat either to British rule or to the war plans of the Allies.' (Source: *ibid.* p. 395) Indeed as he summarises: 'By the end of 1942, the British had definitely come out victorious in their immediate total confrontation with Indian nationalism, and the remaining two and a half years of the war (Second World War) passed without any serious political challenge from within the country. Yet the 'victory' was ambiguous and with severe limits, and had been possible only because war conditions had allowed really ruthless use of force. The British would never again risk such a confrontation, and that the decision in 1945 to try for a negotiated settlement was not just a gift of the new Labour government is indicated by the attitude of Wavell, the by no means ultra-liberal army commander who became Viceroy in October 1943. In a letter to Churchill dated 24 October 1944, Wavell pointed out that it would be impossible to hold India by force after the war, given the likely state of world opinion and British popular or even army attitudes (as well as the economic exhaustion of Britain, he might have added). 'We have had to negotiate with similar rebels before, e.g. De Valera and Zaghlul', and it would in fact be wise to start negotiations before the end of the war brought a release of prisoners and unrest due to mobilisation and unemployment, creating 'a fertile field for agitation, unless we have previously diverted their (Congress) energies into some more profitable channel, i.e. into dealing with the administrative problems of India and into trying to solve the constitutional problem'. (Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal*, pp. 97-8) Churchill's pig headedness delayed the process somewhat but this is precisely what the British were able to persuade the Congress leadership to do after 1945'. (*ibid.* p. 404)

The Indian National Army (INA)

The Indian National Army or 'Azad Hind Fauj' was set up by Subhash Chandra Bose outside India. Bose after he was sidelined within the Congress, spent some time pondering the best course of action and later decided that non-violence would not deliver freedom. The adventures that he thereafter undertook had a huge impact on the psyche of Indians even if the war that the INA had launched was lost by them to the British. The national movement by 1943 had come to a standstill with many of the Congress leaders in jail and the Quit India Movement having died out. As Sumit Sarkar notes: 'As the massive, though ultimately frustrated, anti-imperialist post war years was to reveal, exhaustion of popular energies and tendencies towards compromise and division did not make up the total picture of post-1942 India. The major inspiration for carrying on a relentless struggle against the British came from Subhash Bose's adventures abroad. Bose had set up an Indian Legion in Berlin in 1941, but developed difficulties with the Germans when they tried to use it against Russia, and decided to go to South East Asia. He reached Japanese-controlled Singapore by submarine from Germany in July 1943, issued from there his famous call, "Delhi Chalo", and announced the formation of the Azad Hind Government and the Indian National Army on 21 October 1943.' (*ibid.* p. 410)

The INA made recruitments from soldiers of Indian origin fighting for the British outside India. At the start outbreak of the Second World War in South East Asia, 70,000 Indian troops were stationed in Malaya and the Japanese after their Malayan Campaign had control of a large number of Indian prisoners of war, almost 55,000 nearly. In Germany Subhash Chandra Bose had convinced Hitler, in a series of conferences, to support the cause of Indian Independence, forming the Free India Legion and the Azad Hind Radio. By early 1943, Bose turned his

attention to Southeast Asia. With its large overseas Indian population it was recognised by Bose that the region was fertile ground for establishing a force to fight the Raj.

His appeal to Indians not only inspired the Indian soldiers who were POWs but also his appeals also touched a chord with the Indian expatriates in South Asia as local civilians, from all communities (both Hindus and Muslims) and from all economic and professional backgrounds ranging from barristers, traders to plantation workers joined the INA hugely increasing its strength.

Netaji's had said later at a press conference: "Civil disobedience must develop into armed struggle. And only when the Indian people have received the baptism of fire on a large scale would they be qualified to achieve freedom." Netaji then embarked upon a series of meetings, press conferences, radio broadcasts and lectures in order to explain his immediate task to the people concerned, and the world. Accompanied by Rashbehari Bose, Netaji arrived at Singapore from Tokyo on 27 June and was given a tumultuous welcome by the resident Indians and was profusely 'garlanded' wherever he went. His speeches kept the listeners spellbound. By now, a legend had grown around him, and its magic infected his audiences. Addressing representatives of the Indian communities in East Asia on 4 July he said: "Not content with a civil disobedience campaign, Indian people are now morally prepared to employ other means for achieving their liberation. The time has therefore come to pass on to the next stage of our campaign. All organizations whether inside India or outside, must now transform themselves into a disciplined fighting organization under one leadership. The aim and purpose of this organization should be to take up arms against British imperialism when the time is ripe and signal is given."

The INA had devised a strategy to avoid set-piece battles for which it lacked arms, armament as well as man-power. It was hoped by the INA that once they broke through the British ranks the local populace wherever they went would rise up in revolt in support. Thus they would rely on guerrilla tact army and expected to live off the land, garner support, supplies, and ranks from amongst the local populace to ultimately touch off a revolution. The thinking in the ranks of the INA was that while the war itself hung in balance and nobody was sure if the Japanese would win, initiating a popular revolution with grass-root support within India would ensure that even if Japan lost the war ultimately, Britain would not be in a position to re-assert its colonial authority, which was ultimately the aim of the INA and Azad Hind. The military strategies did not work out as planned particularly because the British brought in the Air Force and the INA could not sustain the aerial bombardment. The INA prisoners who were falling into British hands were evaluated by forward intelligence units for potential trials. By July 1945, a large numbers had been shipped back to India and at the time of the fall of Japan, the remaining captured troops were transported to India via Rangoon. Large numbers of local Malay and Burmese volunteers including the recruits to the Rani of Jhansi regiment returned to civilian life and were not identified. Those repatriated passed through transit camps in Chittagong and Calcutta to be held at detention camps all over India including Jhingergacha and Nilganj near Calcutta, Kirkee outside Pune, Attock, Multan and at Bahadurgarh near Delhi. Bahadurgarh also held prisoners of the Indische Legion. By November, around 12,000 INA prisoners were held in these camps.

The trials of the INA prisoners attracted much publicity and both the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were forced to make the release of the three defendants an important political issue during the agitation for independence of 1945-6 given the massive public emotion surrounding it. In spite of the nationwide massive opposition, the court martial was carried out, and all three defendants were sentenced to deportation for life. This sentence, however, was never carried out, as the immense public pressure of the demonstrations and riots forced Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, to release all three defendants. Within

three months, 11,000 soldiers of the INA were released after cashiering and forfeiture of pay and allowance. On the recommendation of Lord Mountbatten of Burma, and agreed by Nehru, as a precondition for Independence the INA soldiers were not re-inducted into the Indian Army.

It is important to understand the how the basic approach of Bose and the INA was different. Ranjan Borra has expressed this rightly when he says: 'Modern historians in India are taking a second look at the way the country's freedom was achieved, and in that process are demolishing a number of theories, assumptions and myths preached by the "court historians." However, in order to grasp the magnitude of the issue, with its many ramifications, it is essential to understand first the concept of freedom as envisaged by Netaji -- the ideal which motivated him to wrest it from the hands of the British by...arms. In his entire political career, Subhas Chandra Bose was guided by two cardinal principles in his quest for his country's emancipation: that there could be no compromise with alien colonialists on the issue, and that on no account would the country be partitioned. The Indian geographical unity was to be maintained at all costs....politicians under the leadership of Gandhi and Nehru did exactly what Netaji (Bose) never wanted: they negotiated and compromised with the British on the issue of freedom, and in their haste to get into power, agreed to a formula of partitioning India presented to them by the British. The transfer of power was followed by two more developments that were alien to Netaji's philosophy and his blueprint for a free India: introduction of a parliamentary democratic system by Nehru and his decision to keep India in the British Commonwealth of Nations. It was a truncated freedom, achieved over the bloodbath of millions who had perished in fratricidal religious rioting during the process of partition, as the erstwhile India emerged on the world map as the two nations of India and Pakistan. Even so, the fragmented freedom that fell as India's share after the British had skillfully played their age-old game of divide and rule came not as a result of Gandhi's civil disobedience and non-violent movement as the court historians would have us believe; nor was it due to persistent negotiations by Nehru and other Indian National Congress leaders on the conference table, which the British found so easy to keep stalling. The British finally quit when they began to feel the foundations of loyalty being shaken among the British Indian soldiers-the mainstay of the colonial power-as a result of the INA exploits that became known to the world after the cessation of hostilities in East Asia.' (Source: Ranjan Borra, 'Subhash Chandra Bose, The Indian National Army and the War of India's Liberation', *The Journal of Historical Review*, 1982, Vol. 3, No. 4, page 407-439)

Historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar had also written expressing a similar view in his book *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom* as follows: 'There is, however, no basis for the claim that the Civil Disobedience Movement directly led to independence. The campaigns of Gandhi ... came to an ignoble end about fourteen years before India achieved independence ... During the First World War the Indian revolutionaries sought to take advantage of German help in the shape of war materials to free the country by armed revolt. But the attempt did not succeed. During the Second World War Subhash Bose followed the same method and created the INA. In spite of brilliant planning and initial success, the violent campaigns of Subhash Bose failed ... The Battles for India's freedom were also being fought against Britain, though indirectly, by Hitler in Europe and Japan in Asia. None of these scored direct success, but few would deny that it was the cumulative effect of all the three that brought freedom to India. In particular, the revelations made by the INA trial, and the reaction it produced in India, made it quite plain to the British, already exhausted by the war, that they could no longer depend upon the loyalty of the sepoys for maintaining their authority in India. This had probably the greatest influence upon their final decision to quit India.' (Source: R.C. Majumdar, *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967, pp. 58-59)

Michael Edwardes wrote in his book *Last Years of British India*: 'The Government of India had hoped, by prosecuting members of the INA, to reinforce the morale of the Indian army. It succeeded only in creating unease, in making the soldiers feel slightly ashamed that they themselves had supported the British. If Bose and his men had been on the right side-and all India now confirmed that they were-then Indians in the Indian army must have been on the wrong side. It slowly dawned upon the Government of India that the backbone of the British rule, the Indian army, might now no longer be trustworthy. The ghost of Subhash Bose, like Hamlet's father, walked the battlements of the Red Fort (where the INA soldiers were being tried), and his suddenly amplified figure overawed the conference that was to lead to independence. (Source: Michael Edwardes, *The Last Years of British India*, Cleveland, World Pub. Co., 1964, p. 93)

The most interesting evidence of the impact Bose had on the British is perhaps what Clement Atlee himself, the British Prime Minister responsible for conceding independence to India, told Chief justice P.B. Chakrabarty of Calcutta High Court, who had also served as the acting Governor of West Bengal. The Chief Justice wrote addressing the publishers of Dr. R.C. Majumdar's book *A History of Bengal* as follows: "You have fulfilled a noble task by persuading Dr. Majumdar to write this history of Bengal and publishing it ... In the preface of the book Dr. Majumdar has written that he could not accept the thesis that Indian independence was brought about solely, or predominantly by the non-violent civil disobedience movement of Gandhi. When I was the acting Governor, Lord Atlee, who had given us independence by withdrawing the British rule from India, spent two days in the Governor's palace at Calcutta during his tour of India. At that time I had a prolonged discussion with him regarding the real factors that had led the British to quit India. My direct question to him was that since Gandhi's "Quit India" movement had tapered off quite some time ago and in 1947 no such new compelling situation had arisen that would necessitate a hasty British departure, why did they have to leave? In his reply Atlee cited several reasons, the principal among them being the erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian army and navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Netaji. Toward the end of our discussion I asked Atlee what was the extent of Gandhi's influence upon the British decision to quit India. Hearing this question, Atlee's lips became twisted in a sarcastic smile as he slowly chewed out the word, "m-i-n-i-m-a-l!"

The Royal Indian Naval Mutiny

Another major event which convinced the British that their hold on to India was untenable was the great mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy on 18 February, 1946.

After the mutiny the British Weekly intelligence summary issued on the 25th of March, 1946 had noted the Indian army, navy and air force units were no longer trust worthy, and, for the army, "only day to day estimates of steadiness could be made". In particular it was stated if massive public unrest took shape, the armed forces could not be relied upon to support counter-insurgency operations as in the past.

The RIN Mutiny started as a strike by ratings staff of the Royal Indian Navy in protest against general conditions of work and the food provided to the naval men. The mutineers made a demand for equal pay with white sailors and also adopted political causes of that time like release of INA prisoners and pull out of Indian troops from Indonesia. The strike was led by a Naval Central Strike committee formed by the naval men which elected Leading Signallman M.S Khan and Petty Officer Telegraphist Madan Singh as President and Vice-President respectively. The strike was seen as a heroic nationalist upsurge and got support all around in the background of the achievements of the INA. In support of the mutineers demonstrations were held which included a one-day general strike in Bombay. The strike spread to other cities, and the men of the

Royal Indian Air Force and local police forces in some places joined in support. The Naval officers and men began calling themselves the "Indian National Navy" and mockingly started making left-handed salutes to British officers. At some places even, NCOs in the British Indian Army ignored and defied orders from British superiors and in Madras and Pune, the British garrisons had to face revolts within the ranks of the Indian Army. Widespread rioting took place from Karachi to Calcutta. Most interestingly, the naval men hoisted three flags tied together on the ships they controlled — those of the Congress, the Muslim League, and the Red Hammer and Sickle Flag of the Communist Party of India (CPI) attempting to put out a national unity and appeal that was most significant for the times considering the League and the congressmen were already in partition negotiations.

The mutiny was called off following a meeting between the President of the Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC), M. S. Khan, and Vallabh Bhai Patel of the Congress, who had been sent to Bombay to settle the crisis. Patel issued a statement calling on the strikers to end their action, which was later echoed by a statement issued in Calcutta by Mohammed Ali Jinnah on behalf of the Muslim League. Under these powerful pressures from powerful leaders, the strikers had to back down. Despite British assurances widespread arrests were made. These were followed up by courts martial and large scale dismissals from the service. It is worth mentioning none of those dismissed were later reinstated into service either in the Indian or Pakistani navies after independence.

In spite of the heroism of the mutineers and the public enthusiasm and support they generated the mutineers in the armed forces got no support from the national leaders. Mahatma Gandhi, in fact, condemned the riots and the ratings' mutiny, his statement on 3 March 1946 criticised the strikers for mutinying without the call of a "prepared revolutionary party" and without the "guidance and intervention" of "political leaders of their choice". He said the ratings were setting a 'bad and unbecoming example for India' asking them to peacefully resign their jobs instead if they had any grievances and also said strangely 'a combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy...'. The Muslim League issued similar statements saying the unrest of the sailors should not have been taken to the streets however serious the grievances may have been. It is possible the League calculated the rapid emergence of militant mass demonstrations in support of the sailors would erode its central political authority if and when the final transfer of power occurred. The Muslim League also feared the prospect of a destabilised authority at the time of transfer of power.

It was only the Communist Party of India (CPI) which had extended full support to the naval ratings and mobilized their workers for actions in their support. It has been suggested by some historians the class content of the mass uprising had frightened the League and the Congress. Patel and Jinnah, two representative faces of the communal divide, were united on this issue and Gandhi also condemned the 'Mutineers'. Upon surrender, the ratings faced court-martial, imprisonment and victimization. Even after 1947, the governments of Independent India and Pakistan refused to reinstate them or offer compensation.

The most significant aspect of the mutiny, was that Hindus and Muslims had united to resist the British at a time when the undertone was totally communal with the movement for Pakistan at a feverish pitch and negotiations for partition in a real sense already underway. The mutiny received widespread public support not only in Bombay, but also in Karachi and Calcutta on 23 February, in Ahmedabad, Madras and Trichinopoly on the 25th, at Kanpur on the 26th, and at Madurai and several places in Assam on the 26th. Even after the mutiny had been called off the agitations, mass strikes, demonstrations continued for days in support. The British with their

experience of the INA and the RIN mutiny understood finally and fully that the British Indian Armed forces could no longer be relied upon to support the British under all circumstances.

The last message of the Naval Central Strike Committee was poignant: 'Our strike has been a historic event in the life of our nation. For the first time the blood of men in the Services and in the streets flowed together in a common cause. We in the services will never forget this. We know also that you, our brothers and sisters, will not forget. Long live our great people. Jai hind!'. (Source: *The R.I.N Strike*, by a group of victims ratings, Delhi, 1954, p. 75)

QUESTION

1. What were the reasons for the final decision of the British to leave India in your opinion?

SUGGESTED READING

1. R.C. Majumdar, *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1967

PARTITION AND INDEPENDENCE

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The Two Nation Theory
- The Partition and Independence of India

By the end of the Second World War, the British had weakened much militarily and financially. They had lost the strength to hold on to India. The Quit Indian Movement and the unprecedented fervour it created for independence, the brave war waged by Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army (INA) and the terrifying revolt for the British in the navy called the RIN (Royal Indian Navy) Revolt had all contributed to convince the British that they would have to pull out of India. Marxist have suggested that the upsurge of the organised peasant and workers movements through the 1940s had alarmed the British and the right wing dominated high command of the Congress party equally and they mutually were in a great hurry to settle on independence as that was urgently needed to contain this new challenge from the exploited classes to the bourgeoisie interests.

Viceroy Wavell, the last but one viceroy, the last being Mountbatten had in his final draft of the 'break down plan' in September 1946 had already suggested total withdrawal by 31 March, 1948. (Source: Wavell, *The Viceroy's Journal*, p.344)

The independence of India is celebrated but it is often not adequately remembered what were the tragic circumstances in which the independence finally came about. The British during their final parting decided to 'divide and quit' or were forced to (depending on which view one accepts) accept the formation of Indian and Pakistan by dividing united India. There are many controversies and debates that have not ended even after for more than a half century as to exactly what had transpired and why. Why were the rivers of blood that flowed in the communal riots that happened not averted? There are many questions and almost very few final answers.

As Professor Bipan Chandra has rightly said: 'Two questions arise. Why did the British finally quit? Why was partition accepted by the Congress? ...The imperialist answer is that independence was simply the fulfilment of Britain's self-appointed mission to assist the Indian people to self-government. Partition was the unfortunate consequence of the age old Hindu-Muslim rift, of the two communities' failure to agree on how and to whom power was to be transferred. The radical view is that independence was finally wrested by the same mass actions of 1946-47 in which many Communists participated, often as leaders. But the Bourgeoisie leaders of the Congress, frightened by the revolutionary upsurge struck a deal with the imperialist power by which power was transferred to them and the nation paid the price of partition.' Then Professor Bipan Chandra proceeds to lay out his own interpretation of what happened: 'These visions of noble design or revolutionary intent, frustrated by traditional

religious conflict or worldly profit, attractive as they may seem, blur rather than illumine, the sombre reality. In fact independence-partition duality reflects the success-failure dichotomy of the anti-imperialist movement led by the Congress. The Congress had a two fold task : structuring diverse classes, communities, groups and regions into a nation and securing independence from the British rulers for this emerging nation. While the Congress succeeded in building up nationalist consciousness *sufficient* to exert pressure on the British to quit India, it could not complete the task of welding the nation and particularly failed to integrate the Muslims into this nation. It is this contradiction – the success and failure of the national movement – which is reflected in the other contradiction – Independence, but with it Partition.’ (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, p. 487-88)

It should be remembered the British always had relied on ‘divide and rule’ as a policy and at the time of parting and leaving India this was a policy that was no more needed but making strategic foreign policy calculations on what would leave them with the maximum influence in South Asia in the new cold war (with the communist bloc led by Russia) environment that was just beginning then, they decided that it would be in their interest to leave Indian ‘balkanised’ or broken into as many parts as possible along regional, religious and ethnic lines. That is one of the principal reasons why the British had agreed to the partition of India.

As SumitSarkar has pointed out: ‘After a rapid series of 133 interviews with political leader...Mountbatten decided that the Cabinet Mission Plan framework had become untenable, and formulated an alternative with the appropriate code-name Plan Balkan. This envisaged transfer of power to separate provinces (or, to confederations, if formed before the transfer), with the Bengal and Punjab Assemblies being given the options to vote for partition of their provinces; the various units thus formed, along with princely states rendered independent by the lapse of paramount-cy, would then have the choice of joining Indian, Pakistan or remaining separate’. (Source: SumitSarkar, *Modern India*, p. 448)

The British establishment throughout had openly encouraged the fanatic elements for weakening the agitation by nationalists against unendurable economic, social and race oppression that was the result of colonial rule. Indeed the British imperialists had throughout refused to see Indian as a nation preferring to see it as a conglomeration of many nations – a Muslim nation, a Hindu nation, a Dalit nation etc. The British commentators made when speaking of Indians referred to Indians as the people of India and avoided speaking of an Indian nation. This justified the British claim that they need to control Indian for peace and prosperity of Indian as otherwise India would become a chaos breaking up into a thousand pieces and so ungovernable. Also because Indians were not united or homogenous and hence not a nation, they were not capable of national self-government. Indeed many nationalist leaders also agreed India was a nation in the making but that does not mean Indian should not have independence and complete self-rule. But throughout while the Congress argued that Indian Muslims along with Hindus were one nation and many Muslim leaders supported this, others argued they were not. Some, such as Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan (later prime minister of Pakistan) argued that Indian Muslims even were not yet a nation, but would have to be forged into one as otherwise Hindus would using their numerical strength dominate them.

The movement for Muslim self-awakening and identity was started by the Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) and the Aligarh school. Poet Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) became a major voice providing philosophical explanations but it was the lawyer Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1871–1948) who executed the political plan by making Pakistan a political reality, an independent nation state for the Muslim nation of South Asia.

At the heart of the case for demanding a separate Pakistan was what is referred to as the 'two-nation theory'. Many believe it was Allama Iqbal's presidential address to the Muslim League on December 29, 1930 in which formally the first introduction of the two-nation theory was made which was later used in support of the demand for Pakistan. The other famous address where the two nation theory was publicly articulated was the speech of Jinnah on March 22, 1940, in Lahore where he stated Hindus and Muslims belonged to two different religious philosophies, with different social customs and literature, with no inter-marriage and based on conflicting ideas and concepts. Their outlook on life and of life was different and despite 1,000 years of history, the relations between the Hindus and Muslims could not attain the level of cordiality. He stated his position thus in that speech:

"It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that the Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time. The Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures. They neither intermarry nor inter-dine together and, indeed, they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspect on life and of life is different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Mussalmans derive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, different heroes, and different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and, likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built for the government of such a state."

The Two-Nation Theory thus asserted that India was not a nation because of the great variations in the ways of life of people belonging to these two faiths. It was conceded by the proponents of this theory that within each of the religious groups there was a great variation of language, culture and ethnicity and a Punjabi Muslim for instance is closer to a Punjabi Hindu in tastes and ways of life than to a Bengali Muslim. To counter the criticism that a community of vastly varying ethnicities and languages (like the Hindu or the Muslim communities in India) owing to the fact that they came from different geographic regional communities who were territorially intertwined with other communities could not be a nation, the proponents of the two-nation argued the very concept of a nation in the East (Asia) was different from that in the West. In the East they argued religion constituted a complete social order which affects all the activities in life. They said where the allegiance of the people is divided on the basis of religion, the idea of a territorial nationalism has never succeeded. They Muslim communalists argued a Muslim of one country has far more sympathies with a Muslim living in another country than with a non-Muslim living in the same country. Hence while the conception of Indian Muslims as a nation may not be ethnically correct, but socially it was correct. Iqbal had also championed the notion of a pan-Islamic nationhood or *Ummah*.

The Hindu communalists basically agreed with the two nation theory but the Hindu Mahasabha under the leadership of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar opposed the partition of Indian and the creation of Pakistan for that reason. In 1937 at the 19th session of the Hindu Mahasabha held at Ahmedabad, Veer Savarkar in his presidential address had said: "India cannot be assumed today to be Unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main —

the Hindus and the Muslims.” Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar summaries Savarkar's position, in his book ‘Pakistan or The Partition of India’ as follows:

“Mr. Savarkar... insists that, although there are two nations in India, India shall not be divided into two parts, one for Muslims and the other for the Hindus; that the two nations shall dwell in one country and shall live under the mantle of one single constitution;... In the struggle for political power between the two nations the rule of the game which Mr.Savarkar prescribes is to be one man one vote, be the man Hindu or Muslim. In his scheme a Muslim is to have no advantage which a Hindu does not have. Minority is to be no justification for privilege and majority is to be no ground for penalty. The State will guarantee the Muslims any defined measure of political power in the form of Muslim religion and Muslim culture. But the State will not guarantee secured seats in the Legislature or in the Administration and, if such guarantee is insisted upon by the Muslims, such guaranteed quota is not to exceed their proportion to the general population.”

Indeed this question was at the root of the progression of the descent into a separate republic of Pakistan. At first the All-India Muslim League (under Jinnah's leadership) while representing Indian Muslims, felt the Muslims of the subcontinent were a distinct and separate nation from the Hindus but were content to demand only separate electorates, but later decided Muslims would not be safe in a Hindu-dominated India and must have a separate state. The League had demanded self-determination for Muslim-majority areas in the form of a sovereign state promising minorities equal rights and safeguards in these Muslim majority areas. How their leadership was thinking can be gauged from the following statement of Allama Iqbal's explaining the attitude of Muslim delegates to the Round-Table Conference issued in December, 1933 which was a rejoinder to Nehru who had said the attitude of the Muslim delegation was based on “reactionarism”. Iqbal had retorted: “I must put a straight question to Pandit Jawahar Lal, how is India's problem to be solved if the majority community will neither concede the minimum safeguards necessary for the protection of a minority of 80 million people, nor accept the award of a third party; but continue to talk of a kind of nationalism which works out only to its own benefit? This position can admit of only two alternatives. Either the Indian majority community will have to accept for itself the permanent position of an agent of British imperialism in the East, or the country will have to be redistributed on a basis of religious, historical and cultural affinities so as to do away with the question of electorates and the communal problem in its present form.”

But Sumit Sarkar has found that for all the advocacy of the two nation theory by the Muslim communalist leaders none of them were seriously thinking of pursuing the breakup of India and the creation of an independent state for Muslims until much later. He explains: ‘British instigation was not entirely absent in the final stages of the evolution of the Pakistan slogan which was adopted by the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940. The genesis of this demand has sometimes been traced to Iqbal's reference to the need for a ‘North West Indian Muslim state’ in his presidential address to the Muslim League in 1930, but the context of his speech makes it clear that the great Urdu poet and patriot was really visualising not partition but a re-organisation of Muslim majority areas in N.W. India into an autonomous unit within a single weak Indian federation. Choudhary Rehmat Ali's group of Punjabi Muslim students in Cambridge have a much better claim to be regarded as the original proponents of the idea. In two pamphlets, written in 1933 and 1935, Rehmat Ali demanded a separate national status for a new entity for which he coined the name *Pakistan* (From Punjab, Afghan province, Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan). No one took this very seriously at the time, least of the League and other Muslim

delegates to the Round Table Conference who dismissed the idea as a student's pipe dream.'
(Source: SumitSarkar, *Modern India*, p. 378)

Gandhiji had always resolutely opposed the two nation theory. He had said "My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines. To assent to such a doctrine is for me a denial of God." As Bhikhu Parekh has explained: '.....India was not (Gandhi argued) a nation but a civilisation which had over the centuries benefited from the contributions of different races and religions and was distinguished by its plurality, diversity and tolerance. It was a community of communities, each enjoying considerable autonomy within a larger and shared framework. As for Hindus and Muslims, they had lived side by side in the villages and cities for centuries without ever feeling that they were enemies or oppressed one by the other. India was a united country long before the Muslims came, and it was absurd to argue it had ceased to be so afterwards. What was more, most Muslims were converted Hindus and their claim to nationhood was no more valid than would be that of a section of English citizens converted to Islam to a separate state in England. As Gandhi wrote to Jinnah, 'I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of a change of the faith of a very large body of her children'.
(Source: Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, p. 177ff)

Broadly the most significant turn of events leading up to demanding complete partition are as follows. The All India Muslim League (AIML) was formed in Dhaka in 1906 by Muslims complained that Muslim members did not have the same rights as Hindu members in the assemblies and started demanding separate electorates and reservations of seats. A number of different scenarios were proposed at various times. As mentioned above among the first to make the demand for a separate state was the poet Iqbal, who, in his presidential address to the 1930 convention of the Muslim League said that a separate nation for Muslims was essential as otherwise Hindus would definitely eventually dominate. The Sindh Assembly had passed a resolution making a demand for partition in 1935.

The Congress under the leadership of Gandhi and his adherents had struggled to build and maintain the influence of the Congress on Muslims and keep Muslim leaders in the Congress Party but a trend of Muslims leaving the party and joining Muslim communalist parties began in the 1930s. Indeed it was only after Jinnah's entry in the League who had until then supported Hindu-Muslim unity in a real sense led to the movement for this new nation later called Pakistan. By 1930, Jinnah had begun to argue that mainstream parties such as the Congress, of which he was once a member, were insensitive to Muslim interests. The 1932 communal award which seemed to threaten the position of Muslims in Hindu-majority provinces helped the resurgence of the Muslim League, with Jinnah as its leader. However, the Muslim League fared badly in the 1937 provincial elections, demonstrating the weak hold of the conservative and local forces at the time as opposed to national parties like the Congress. It was in 1940 that Jinnah made the famous speech at the Lahore conference calling for a separate Muslim 'nation'. However, the idea was left ambiguous and opaque, and did not talk of territorial divisions. Later this is what happened when Muslims and Hindus both in the next seven years agreed to a tragic territorial meaning to the idea of partition. Initially all Muslim political parties including the Khaksar Tehrik of Allama Mashriqi opposed the partition of India. Allama Mashriqi believed that Hindus and Muslims could and should live in amity and Mashriqi was arrested on 19 March 1940. Most of the Congress leaders were resolutely opposed the division of India as well. As mentioned above Hindu organisations such as the Hindu Mahasabha, though against the division of the

country, never gave up their support for the notion that Hindus and Muslims were separate nations.

Until 1946, the definition of Pakistan as demanded by the League was so flexible that it could have been interpreted as a sovereign nation Pakistan, or as a member of a confederated India.

Some like Pakistani historian Ayesha Jalal have argued Jinnah intended to use the threat of partition as a bargaining chip in order to gain more independence for the Muslim dominated provinces in the west from the Hindu dominated centre. She has laid much store by the fact that the Lahore Resolution of 1940 did not contain the word 'Pakistan'. That may be so, but it seems the evidence of the spirit of the political stance that prevailed at the conference and the drift of Jinnah's speech all point to the fact that the idea of Pakistan was already under implementation for there was even in the draft of the resolution a constant harping on the right to self-determination and that Muslims were a separate nation.

Doubts are expressed on Jinnah's real intentions and beliefs perhaps rightly as he himself said the following in his statement in the Pakistan Constituent Assembly on 11 August, 1947: "We should begin to work...and in the course of time, all these angularities of the majority and minority will vanish...you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the State."

After the poor showing of the league in the 1937 elections Jinnah had become desperate and he started hardening his position for an independent Pakistan. In the 1945-46 elections the Muslim League had spectacular success. They won all the 30 reserved constituencies in the centre with 86.6% of Muslim votes, and 442 out of 509 Muslim seats in the provinces. SumitSarkar comments: 'The most significant feature of the elections, however, was the prevalence of communal voting, in sharp contrast to the sporadic but very striking anti-British unity forged in these months in the streets of Calcutta, Bombay, or even Karachi. Apart from the logic of separate electorates, it is possible that the extremely limited franchise (about 10% of the population, less than 1% for the Central Assembly) may have had something to do with this disparity. The N.W.F.P. Governor, for instance, reported to Wavell in February 1946 that while Muslim officials and the 'bigger Khans' or landlords were all for the League, the Congress was still getting the support of the 'less well-to-do' Muslims due to its promise of economic reforms (pro poor) – promises, however, which were not implemented either after 1937 or in 1946-47'. (Source: SumitSarkar, *Modern India*, p. 426-7)

The 1946 Cabinet Mission was sent to try and reach a compromise between Congress and the Muslim League. A compromise proposing a decentralized state with much power given to local governments won initial acceptance, but Nehru was unwilling to accept such a decentralized state and Jinnah soon returned to demanding an independent Pakistan. On the question of whether the representatives who will engage in discussions and negotiations should be elected on the basis of universal adult franchise only the communists were steadfast. As SumitSarkar has pointed out: 'P. C. Joshi repeated the same demand for universal adult franchise in his meeting with the Cabinet Mission on 17 April 1946 (Mansergh, Vol, VII, pp. 291-3). Congress leaders, in sharp contrast, quietly accepted the election of the Constituent Assembly by the existing provincial legislatures based on limited voting rights. Much more was involved here than a question of abstract democratic principle. The League won its demand for Pakistan without its claim to represent the majority of Muslims being really tested, either in fully democratic elections or (as Congress claims had been) in sustained mass movements in the face of official

representation (as distinct from occasional communal riots not unaccompanied by official complicity).' (Source: SumitSarkar, *Modern India*, p. 426-7)

The situation rapidly deteriorated in August 1946 when the League carried out Direct Action day. The communal holocaust was unprecedented and one of the worst in human history as a forcible exchange of population commenced on its own motion as it were. The worst rioting took place in Punjab and Bengal, the two provinces which would be split between India and Pakistan as a consequence of the partition. The flow of blood, loss of property and rapes was horrendous and massive in scale. Nehru and the nationalist leaders have said they accepted partition to stop this carnage as that seemed the most urgent necessity if law and order was to be restored.

There is no doubt morally Indian on the whole never accepted the logic of partition. Maulana Azad in his memoir *India Wins Freedom* has written: 'The people of India did not accept partition. In fact, their heart and soul rebelled against the very idea. I have said that the Muslim League enjoyed the support of many Indians, but there was a large section of the community which has always opposed the League. They were naturally cut by the decision to divide the country. As for the Hindus and the Sikhs, they were to a man opposed to partition.'

(Source: Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, p. 224)

Then why did he and the Congress accept partition. Nehru has observed: 'I know that we have been to blame in many matters...Partition came and we accepted it because we thought that perhaps that way, however painful it was, we might have some peace...Perhaps we acted wrongly. It is difficult to judge now. And yet, the consequences of that partition have been so terrible that one is inclined to think that anything else would have been preferable. ...Ultimately, I have no doubt that India and Pakistan will come close together...some kind of federal link...There is no other way to peace. The alternative is... war.' (Source: Wolpert: *Shameful Flight*, p. 192)

Finally, the actual division or partition of India and the creation of the two new nation state states was done according to what has come to be known as the 3 June 1947 Plan or Mountbatten Plan. The border between India and Pakistan was determined by a British Government-commissioned report usually referred to as the Radcliffe Line after the London lawyer, Sir Cyril Radcliffe, who wrote it. Pakistan was created came with two non-contiguous enclaves, East Pakistan (today Bangladesh) and West Pakistan, separated geographically by India. India was formed out of the majority Hindu regions and Pakistan from the majority Muslim areas.

It was on 18 July 1947 that the British Parliament passed the Indian Independence Act that granted freedom to India and Pakistan and put the legal seal on the partition arrangement. The Government of India Act 1935 was adapted to provide a legal framework for the two new states.

Massive population exchanges occurred in the months immediately following Partition accompanied by relentless bloodshed and once the border lines were established, about 14.5 million people crossed the borders – Muslims to Pakistan and Hindus to India. According to the 1951 Census of displaced persons, 7,226,000 Muslims went to Pakistan from India while 7,249,000 Hindus and Sikhs moved to India from Pakistan immediately after partition. Of the two fronts, the western in Punjab and the eastern in Bengal, 78% of the population transfer took place in the west, with Punjab accounting for most of it; 5.3 million Muslims moved from India to West Punjab in Pakistan, 3.4 million Hindus and Sikhs moved from Pakistan to East Punjab in India; elsewhere in the west 1.2 million moved in each direction to and from Sind. The newly formed governments were completely unequipped to deal with migrations of such scale. Massive

violence and slaughter occurred on both sides of the border and the number of deaths may have been as high as onemillion or ten lakh making the partition carnage the biggest communal holocaust in history.

It has been alleged British haste in leaving and in withdrawing from the control of the executive control of the administration led to the cruelties of the Partition and because independence was declared prior to the actual partition, it was up to the new governments of India and Pakistan to maintain law and order. There was no planning and preparation for the exchange of population and to deal with the refugees who cross the border. There was no planning done for dealing with any communal riots (that should have been anticipated). There was a complete breakdown of law and order; many died in riots, massacre, or just from the hardships of their flight to safety. Apart from the killed twelve million became homeless. However, some argue that the British were forced to expedite the Partition by events on the ground and because both sides (the Congress and the League) were asking for it. After World War II, Britain had limited resources and could not have rushed in troops from elsewhere. Historian Lawrence James has said in 1947 Mountbatten was left with no option but to cut and run for otherwise the British would have got involved in a civil war from which it would have been difficult and taken many years to get out.

There is one school of historians who are of the opinion that the British expedited the partition and independence of India because they and the Congress top leadership from the right wing high command equally were very worried and alarmed by the growth of the left movement and saw that as a threat to their respective interests. Sumit Sarkar writes: 'The socially radical movements of which Telengana was the climax never coalesced into an organised and effective country-wide political alternative. The fear they undoubtedly inspired, however, helped to bring about the final compromise by which a 'peaceful' transfer of power was purchased at the cost of Partition and a communal holocaust. V.P. Menon, the senior bureaucrat who was to play a key role in 1947-48 as confidante of Patel and trusted advisor of Wavell and later of Mountbatten, reported to the Viceroy in the wake of the early-1947 strike wave 'that Congress leaders were losing popularity...there were serious internal troubles in Congress and great fear of the Left Wing; and that the danger of labour difficulties was acute'. A week later, Wavell's *Journal* recorded a conversation with Patel 'about the danger of the Communists. I got the impression he would like to declare the Party illegal.' (Source: SumitSarkar, *Modern India*, p. 446)

Others like Professor Bipan Chandra would not agree but even he would agree it is a difficult question to answer why the Congress leadership accepted partition. As he puts it: 'Why did Nehru and Patel advocate acceptance of the 3rd June Plan and the Congress Working Committee and AICC pass a resolution in favour of it? Most surprising of all, why did Gandhi acquiesce? Nehru and Patel's acceptance of Partition has been popularly interpreted as stemming from their lust for quick and easy power, which made them betray the people. Gandhiji's counsels are believed to have been ignored and it is argued that he felt betrayed by his disciples and even wished to end his life, but heroically fought communal frenzy single handedly – a 'one man boundary force', as Mountbatten called him. ...It is forgotten that Nehru, Patel and Gandhiji in 1947 were only accepting what had become inevitable because of the long-term failure of the Congress to draw in the Muslim masses into the national movement and stem the surging waves of Muslim communalism, which, especially since 1937, had been beating with increasing fury. This failure was revealed with stark clarity by the 1946 elections in which the League won 90 per cent Muslim votes. Though the war against Jinnah was lost by early 1946, defeat was conceded only after the final battle was mercilessly waged in the streets of Calcutta and Rawalpindi and the village lanes of Noakhali and Bihar. The Congress leaders felt by June 1947

that only an immediate transfer of power could forestall the spread of Direct Action and communal disturbances. The virtual collapse of the interim government also made Pakistan appear to be an unavoidable reality...In the face of the Governor's abetting the League and the Bengal Ministry's inaction and even complicity in riots, Nehru wondered whether there was any point in continuing in the Interim Government while people were being were being butchered. Immediate transfer of power would at least mean the setting up of a government which could exercise the control it was now expected to wield, but was powerless to exercise. ...The acceptance of Partition in 1947 was, thus, only the final act of a process of step by step concession to the League's intransigent championing of a sovereign Muslim state. Autonomy of Muslim majority provinces was accepted in 1942 at the time of the Cripps Mission. Gandhiji went a step further and accepted the right of self determination of Muslim majority provinces in his talks with Jinnah in 1944....The final act of surrender to the League's demands was in June 1947 when congress ended up accepting partition under the 3rd June Plan....The brave words of the leaders contrasted sharply with the tragic retreat of the Congress. ...the Congress leaders finally accepted partition most of all because they could not stop communal riots.' Another point made by Professor Bipan Chandra is that Gandhiji accepted partition because he felt the Indian people wanted it. He writes; 'What about Gandhiji? Gandhiji's unhappiness and helplessness have often been pointed out. His inaction has been explained in terms of his forced isolation from the Congress decision making councils...In our view the root of Gandhiji's helplessness was neither Jinnah's intransigence nor his disciple's alleged lust for power, but the communalisation of his people. At his prayer meeting on 4th of June 1947 he explained that Congress accepted Partition because the people wanted it: 'The demand has been granted because you asked for it. The Congress never asked for it ...But the Congress can feel the pulse of the people. It realised that the Khalsa as also the Hindus desired it'. It was the Hindu's and Sikh's desire for partition that rendered him ineffective, blind, impotent. The Muslims already considered him their enemy. What was a mass leader without masses who would follow his call? How could he base a movement to fight communalism on a communal people? ...He walked bravely into the AICC meeting on 14 June, 1947 and asked congressmen to accept Partition as an unavoidable necessity in the given circumstances, but to fight it in the long run by not accepting it in their hearts.' (Source: Bipan Chandra and others, *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 500-4)

Gandhi had once made the suggestion that Jinnah should be offered the Prime minister-ship of an undivided united India believing that would make him and the Muslim League give up his demand for Pakistan. But one cannot be so sure. He once said in a speech: "Muslim India cannot accept any Constitution which must necessarily result in a Hindu majority government. Hindus and Muslims brought together under a democratic system forced upon the minority can only mean Hindu Raj. Democracy of this kind...would mean the complete destruction of what is most precious in Islam."

QUESTIONS

1. What is the two-nation theory? Explain and trace its origins.
2. Discuss the various factors underlying the tragedy of the partition of India.

SUGGESTED READING

1. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*
2. Maulana Azad, *India Wins Freedom*

LESSON 12

NATIONALIST LEGACIES

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Objectives

After reading this article you will be familiar with:

- The Motilal Nehru Committee Report and the Legacy of Rights, Constitutionalism and Democracy
- Socialism and the nationalist legacy
- The idea of Swaraj
- The idea of Secularism

The national struggle as it developed left a legacy in terms of new ideas that requires adequate appreciation to understand both how the Constitution of free India came to be in the form that it did and the direction that the political goals which were espoused subsequently, post-independence, took.

The Indian national movement proceeded with an underlying commitment to a system based on representative democracy and the guarantee of the basic civil liberties and rights for every individual. These were not ideas (of a constitutional democracy), while prevalent in the democratic west for some time that had a similar history in India. Hence they were novel ideas and required deep roots to establish themselves that the national movement helped put down.

As Professor Bipan Chandra has rightly commented: 'From the very beginning the movement popularised democratic ideas and institutions among the people and struggled for the introduction of parliamentary institutions on the basis of popular elections. Starting from the turn of the twentieth century, the nationalists demanded the introduction of adult franchise. Much attention was also paid to the defence of the freedom of the press and speech against attacks by the colonial authorities besides the promotion of other political and economic policies. Throughout, the movement struggled to expand the semi-democratic political arena and prevent the rulers from limiting the existing space within which legal political activities and peaceful political agitations and mass struggle could be organised.' (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India after Independence*, p. 21)

One of the major early developments which formally put down in writing the constitutional notion of rights to be guaranteed by the rulers or the state was the Motilal Nehru Report. The British government announced the appointment of the Simon Commission to enquire into whether and to what extent the principle of responsible government may be introduced but because it had no Indians on it, all political quarters at that time including the Congress and the Muslim parties had decided to boycott it. Instead a committee of all parties (the All Parties Conference) known popularly as the Nehru committee under the leadership of Motilal Nehru (assisted by his son Jawaharlal as secretary) was constituted which submitted a report which recommended for the first time the creation of a federation, as a 'constitutional remedy to drive out the twin evils of autocracy and compartmental-ism from Indian political life' and also

recommended a complete transfer of power on the basis of such a federation, to the Indian people. Indian nationalist opinion was gathering strength by the day and was quoting the English philosopher James Stuart Mill to the British again and again who had said once: 'the government of one people by another has no meaning and no reality, except as the governing people treat the governed as a human cattle farm'.

The Nehru Committee chaired by Motilal had nine members including two Muslims. The British policy was that the timing and nature of Indian constitutional development was to be decided exclusively by the British parliament though it was assumed that Indians would be consulted from time to time as the British felt appropriate. This was formally stated in the Government of India Act 1919.

The rejection by Indian leaders of the all-white Simon Commission had caused Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India to make a speech in the House of Lords in which he had challenged the Indians to draft a Constitution given the vast divides that existed along religious and caste lines etc. – in short because Indians were not one united nation. Birkenhead had written to Irwin: "I am entirely in favour of inducing the malcontents to produce their own proposals, for in the first place I believe them to be quite incapable of surmounting the constitutional and constructive difficulties involved; in the second, if these were overcome, I believe that a unity which can only survive in an atmosphere of generalisation would disappear at once."

The draft constitution that the committee came out with under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru is known as the 'Nehru Report'. The membership of the committee was designed to represent the views of Muslims, Hindu Brahminical orthodoxy, non-Brahmins, labour, and the Liberals. The report declared:

"It is obvious that our first care should be to have our Fundamental Rights guaranteed in a manner which will not permit their withdrawal under any circumstances.....Another reason why great importance attaches to a Declaration of Rights is the unfortunate existence of communal differences in the country. Certain safeguards are necessary to create and establish a sense of security among those who look upon each other with distrust and suspicion. We could not better secure the full enjoyment of religious and communal rights to all communities than by including them among the basic principles of the Constitution." (Source: All Parties Conference, Report of a Committee to Determine Principles of the Constitution for India, the Nehru Report, pp.89-90)

The rights of the Nehru Report were a close precursor, according to Austin, of the Fundamental Rights of the Constitution. Ten of the Nineteen sub-clauses re-appear, materially unchanged, and three of the Nehru Rights are included in the Directive Principles of the Constitution contained in Part IV. The Nehru Report was also very keen in terms of the provisions to ensure protection to minorities. There was an explicit wish expressed that the provisions for the free profession and practice of religion was included explicitly to prevent 'one community domineering over another'. (Source: *ibid.*)

Indian leaders took up the challenge and produced the Motilal Nehru Report which had the following significant features:

1. It enjoined for Indians enjoying dominion status within the British Commonwealth.
2. Unlike the eventual Government of India Act 1935 it contained a Bill of Rights. Later the Indian Constitution was to have a whole separate chapter on 'Fundamental Rights' which has been held by the Supreme Court of India to be part of the basic feature of the constitution and outside the amendment power of the legislature.

3. All power of government and all authority - legislative, executive and judicial - was provided to have been derived from the people and that hence the same shall be exercised through organizations established by, or under, and in accord with, the Constitution.
4. The draft provided there shall be no state religion
5. and men and women shall have equal rights as citizens.
6. The draft constitution provided for a federal form of government with residuary powers vested in the centre which it has been argued made the constitution more unitary than federal.
7. There were detailed provisions laying out the structure or machinery of government
8. There was a proposal for the creation of a Supreme Court, as the highest adjudicating authority in the land.
9. There was also a suggestion that the provinces should be linguistically determined.
10. The draft did not provide for separate electorates for any community or reserved seats in the legislature or the executive for minorities. This was attacked and declared unacceptable by the Muslim League later and in the eventual Government of India Act 1935 this was provided for as per the wishes of the League and other Muslim communalist parties.
11. However, the Nehru draft did provide for the reservation of minority seats in the provinces for minorities who constituted at least ten percent of the population but only in strict proportion to the size of the community.
12. It was further strangely provided that the language of the Commonwealth shall be Indian, which may be written either in Devanagari in Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil or in the Urdu character. The use of the English language was permitted.

The Nehru Report and the report of the Simon Commission formed the basis or the background for the negotiations held in the three Indian Round Table Conferences 1931-1933.

Democracy has a political aspect, a social aspect and an economic aspect. Development of Constitutionalism in the Indian context has been mainly a source for providing democracy from the political point of view in the sense that with limitations people on the whole have the power to vote ('universal adult franchise') and elect their rulers and have a government that would be based on written laws ('rule of law') and not on the whims and fancies of individual rulers or particular ruling families. Also the institutional structures of Executive, Judiciary and the Legislature and their defined inter-relationships are a product of achieving greater and greater levels of constitutional democracy. Indeed concepts like secularism in the Indian context and the role of a free and active media also is part of the development of constitutionalism. Further the idea of a written constitution can only be understood with the development of constitutionalism and constitutionalism and democracy reinforce each other. In India's case too constitutionalism and democracy converged and developed together in conjunction.

Prof Bipan Chandra rightly remarks: 'More than passing resolutions on the need for, or the framing of proposals for constitutional reform the heart of the national movement's contribution lay in its concrete political practice. This popularised among the people the notions of parliamentary democracy, republicanism, civil liberties, social and economic justice, which were among the essential principles of the Constitution. For example, the idea of a parliamentary form of government was introduced into the Indian political consciousness by the inclusion of the term 'Congress' (the Lower House in USA), in the name of the Indian National Congress. The actual functioning of the Congress organisation, especially from 1920 onwards, after Gandhiji modified the Congress constitution, was based on the elective principle.' (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India After*

Independence, p. 31) He also rightly concludes: 'The legacy of the national movement could be summarised as: a commitment to political and economic independence, modern economic development, the ending of inequality, oppression and domination in all forms, representative democracy and civil liberties, internationalism and independent foreign policy, promotion of the process of nation-in-the-making on the basis of the joyous acceptance of the diversity, and achievement of all these objectives through accommodative politics and with the support of a large majority of the people.' (Source: *ibid.* p. 30)

Thus there was present the over-riding concern for uplifting India's poor and securing social justice. Thus socialism also became a legacy of the national struggle in the new India that emerged as many of the major leaders like Nehru subscribed to parts of that ideology at least.

Austin has pointed out 'most members of the Assembly thought of themselves as Socialists, and with few exceptions the members believed that the best and perhaps only way to the social and economic goals that India sought was by the road of government initiative and control of industry and commerce'. (Source: Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 14-15)

As has been mentioned before, the leaders of the national movement were aware of the acute need for 'social justice' and development. To their credit, while throwing out the British was their principal aim, they were also aware in that in the end freedom would have no real meaning if it wasn't accompanied by the gradual creation of equal opportunities for all and the basics of a reasonable material existence. As Austin says, 'two revolutions, the national and the social, had been running parallel in India since the end of the First World War.....with independence, the national revolution would be completed, but the social revolution must go on'. (Source: *ibid.* p.26) Nehru had again and again reminded everybody in the Constituent Assembly that freedom was not an end in itself, but only a means to an end the aim being the 'raising of the people.....to higher levels and hence the general advancement of humanity'. (Source: Nehru, *'Unity of India'*, 1938, p.11.) Indeed Nehru had at the very beginning declared as follows in the Constituent Assembly: "The first task of this assembly is to free India through a new constitution to feed the starving people, and to clothe the naked masses, and give every Indian the fullest opportunity to develop himself according to his capacity." (Source: *CAD II*, 3, 316)

Interestingly even as support for socialism was a legacy Austin says there was a feeling that in the 'age of modern communications and Communist revolutions', there was clearly a fear of communist ideology and revolutions taking hold if social justice was not delivered soon. K. Santhanam expressed the apprehension as follows:

"The choice for India is between rapid evolution and violent revolution....because the Indian masses cannot and will not wait for a long time to obtain the satisfaction of their minimum needs". (Source: *The Hindustan Times*, Magazine Section, 17th August 1947)

Austin believes the final choice of India's constitutional decisions were also influenced by the preference for socialism, intellectually and emotionally, that most assembly members had because of their participation in the national struggle. He comments on this as follows:

"Although they (the socialists) ranged from Marxists through Gandhian socialists to conservative capitalists, each with his own definition of 'socialism', nearly everyone in the assembly was Fabian and Laski-ite enough to believe that 'socialism is everyday politics for social regeneration', and that 'democratic constitutions are ... inseparably associated with the drive towards economic equality'. (Source: Granville Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation*,

Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1966, p.41) But the commitment to socialism was not to be at the remotest expense of democracy even if its meaningfulness was thereby compromised. So only the communists would have been less than fully happy with this interpretation when the Congress Socialist Party declared in a resolution in 1947 that 'there could be no Socialism without Democracy'.

Another major legacy of the national struggle was of course the whole idea of self-rule. Indians had not only to be taught to think and feel like a nation composed of one people but also the idea of ruling themselves or *swaraj*. The idea arose in the militant nationalism of the famous Lal-Bal-Pal era with their emotionally powerful slogan of 'Swaraj is my birth right' which got further established when the public witnessed the heroism of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh.

The other great contribution to the establishment of the idea of *swaraj* was of course with the entry of Gandhi. Gandhi could evolve a program of struggle which could recognise the role of the masses and the mass actions which involved every section of the society and for the first time it was under his leadership that Indian national movement became a multi-class nationalist movement and it was under his leadership that masses came out to court arrest, jails and cold face police firing and created an undying hatred against the British rule and a obviously a thrust for *swaraj* or freedom. It should also be remembered that Gandhi provided a program of action for each section of the society. For peasantry, non-payment of land tax, for students, boycott of educational institutions, for lawyers, desertion of the courts, for women – picketing the liquor shops, foreign cloth shops and he asked the people as a whole to violate 'lawless laws' and it is under his call that millions of Indians joined the demonstrations and marched into jails using methods of satyagraha, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience.

He once commented: '[You] want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature, not the tiger; that is to say, you would make India English. And when it becomes English, it will be called not Hindustan but *Englistan*. That is not the Swaraj I want.' (Source: *Hind Swaraj*, p. 15)

As Bhikhu Parekh has explained: 'He argued political independence was important not only as an expression of India's pride and a necessary means to stop its economic exploitation but also to preserve its civilisation, without which political independence remained fragile. The economic exploitation had to be ended not only to sustain Indian independence and improve the living conditions of its people but also to preserve the social and economic basis of its civilisation.' (Source: *Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, pp. 19-20)

Swaraj as understood and preached by Gandhi laid stress on a system of *swaraj* or government or state that was not a hierarchy. He rejected the top down bureaucratic structure of the British as unsuited to the character of India and suggested a system that used the strength of the Panchayat system. Gandhi called the western design of the state a "soulless machine" which, ultimately, does the greatest harm to mankind. A paradoxical situation is created where the citizens are alienated from the state and at the same time enslaved to it which was demoralizing and dangerous.

Gandhi gave an integral conception of *swaraj*. At the individual level Swaraj according to him meant the capacity for self-assessment, ceaseless self-purification and growing self-reliance. Politically *swaraj* meant self-government and not good government and it meant a continuous effort to be independent of government control, whether it is foreign government or whether it is national. In other words, it is sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority.

Economically, *swaraj* according to Gandhi meant full economic freedom for the toiling millions. Thus Gandhi had a complex spiritual interpretation of *swaraj*.

Gandhi explained his vision in 1946 thus:

"Independence begins at the bottom... A society must be built in which every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without... This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be a free and voluntary play of mutual forces... In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Growth will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it." (Source: Murthy, *Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy Letters*, Long Beach Publications, Long Beach, 1987, p. 189)

Since achieving *swaraj* was not be possible without the elimination of all forms of domination, Gandhi decided to undertake a number of constructive activities aimed at reducing the dependence of Indians from the British and simultaneously also making them self-reliant. That was the reason for founding the khadi movement. Indeed in later years wearing khadi clothes was called wearing 'swadeshi'. The spinning wheel or the Charkha became a symbol of the Indian freedom struggle.

The next major development which gave a fillip to the establishment of the idea of self-rule or *swaraj* was the Congress resolution of 1927 which empowered the Working Committee to set up a committee 'to draft a *Swaraj* Constitution for India on the basis of a declaration of rights'.

Austin comments on the significance of this thus:

"That a declaration of rights had assumed such importance was not surprising: India was a land of communities, of minorities, racial, religious, linguistic, social, and caste. For India to become a state, these minorities had to agree to be governed both at the centre and in the provinces by fellow Indians – members, perhaps, of another minority – and not by a mediator third power, the British. On both psychological and political grounds, therefore, the demand for written rights – since rights would provide tangible safeguards against oppression – proved overwhelming. 'The community, so to say, is a federal process', Laski wrote. And Indians believed that in their 'federation of minorities' a declaration of rights was as necessary as it had been for the Americans when they established the first federal constitution." (Source: *ibid.* p. 54)

The idea of 'secularism' was another major legacy of the national struggle. But the idea in the Indian context meant non-discrimination between different religions rather than keeping away from all matters spiritual or religious. Indeed in this sense secularism had a long history and The Queen Victoria in her proclamation of 1858 when direct rule from London began and the East India Company's rule ended, which brought the century old rule of the East India Company to an end, said among other things:

'We disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions (religious) on any of our subjects. We declare it to be our royal will and pleasure that none be in any ways be favoured, none molested or disquieted by reason of their religious faith or observances, but that all shall alike enjoy the equal and impartial protection of the law; and we do strictly charge and enjoin all those who may be in authority under us that they abstain from all interference with the religious belief or worship of any of our subjects on pain of our highest displeasure.'

Later the Congress and Gandhi realized the vital importance of promoting communal harmony to build national unity. Professor Bipan Chandra explains the legacy of secularism well: 'From its early days, the national movement was committed to secularism. Secularism was defined in a comprehensive manner which meant the separation of religion from politics and the state, the treatment of religion as a private matter for the individual, state neutrality towards or equal respect for all religions, absence of discrimination between followers of different religions, and active opposition to communalism. For example, to counter communalism and give expression to its secular commitment, Congress in its Karachi resolution of 1931 declared that in free India 'every citizen shall enjoy freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess and practice his religion,' that all citizens would be equal before the law, irrespective of caste creed or sex 'in regard to public employment, office or power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling,' and that 'the State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions'.

It is true that in his early years, Gandhi, a deeply religious person, emphasized the close connection between religion and politics. This was because he believed that politics had to be based on morality, and to him all religions were the source of morality. Religion was, in fact, he believed, itself morality in the Indian sense of dharma. But he not only moved the Karachi resolution in 1931, but when he saw that the communalists were using religion as a sectarian belief-system to divide the people, he overtly began to preach the separation of religion from politics. Thus he said in 1942: 'Religion is a personal matter which should have no place in politics'. And again in 1947: 'Religion is the personal affair of each individual. It must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs'. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote and spoke passionately and with deep understanding on communalism. He was perhaps the first Indian to see communalism as the Indian form of fascism. Interestingly, the leaders of the national movement never appealed to the people on religious grounds or that the British rulers' religion was Christianity. Their critique of British rule was invariably economic, political, social or cultural.

It is true that the national movement was able to counter forces of communalism adequately or evolve an effective strategy against them. This contributed to the Partition and the communal carnage of 1946-47. But it was because of the strong secular commitment of the national movement that, despite these traumatic events, independent India made secularism a basic pillar of its Constitution, as also of its state and society.' (Source: Bipan Chandra, *India After Independence*, p. 27)

The greatest legacy of the national movement was perhaps the realisation among the national leaders of freedom struggle that India was a nation-in-the-making rather than a nation and hence the right combination of political and economic policies would be needed to convert that nation-in-the-making into a full-fledged nation. Bipan Chandra has therefore rightly observed: 'Promoting this process through the common struggle against colonialism became a basic objective. In this respect, the leadership of the movement acknowledged the role of colonialism in unifying India economically and administratively even while it criticized its furthering all kinds of politically divisive tendencies....To the nationalist leaders, the notion of a structured nation did not contradict its unity. They not only acknowledged but also appreciated India's rich cultural, linguistic, religious, ethnic and regional diversity. The emergence of a strong national identity and the flowering of other narrower identities were seen as mutually reinforcing processes....Indian society was also divided by class. But while not letting class divisions to segment it, the movement did not stand in the way of class organisations and class struggles.' (Source: *ibid.*)

It may be said the legacy of the national movement has been respected by the Indian nation that has emerged to a large extent at least as far as working the constitution is concerned and which contains many of those basic legacies enshrined as fundamental rights.

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the legacy of the national movement as far as constitutionalism and awareness of basic rights is concerned?
2. Discuss the idea of swaraj.
3. How and why the idea of socialism may be said to be a major legacy of the national struggle?

SUGGESTED READING

1. Granville Austin, The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation
2. Bipan Chandra, India after Independence, Chapters 2 and 3