UNIT 8   AUSTRALIAN NATIONALISM

Structure

8.1   INTRODUCTION

Scholars have divergent views in defining nationalism, although in the last two centuries the doctrine of nationalism is one of the most dominant ideologies in the world. Following the American and the French Revolution in the last quarter of the 18th century, the notion of nation became predominant suggesting that the world is divided into distinct nations and each is having a distinct character. There are historians who believe in the existence of nations even much before among Greeks, Jews, Persians, Egyptians, French, English, etc. Majority of historians, however, argue the modernity of the concept of nation and provide different explanations for the emergence of nation. Nationalism is seen by many as the result of the development of national sentiments or national consciousness among a group or groups of people inhabiting a definite territory and very often sharing common culture and language. There are also instances where nationalist consciousness developed in societies in the absence of any strong sense of national identity among the population. In many instances it is the intellectuals who, through their literary and art works, have instilled the spirit of nationalism among the cross section of population in the society. History of political movements or assertions for national identity is not necessarily the same course of development all over the world. Depending on the context and the circumstances we find much variation in the origin and nature of nationalism in different countries of the world. Even the countries, which were once part of the colonial empire, not necessarily, had gone through the same process towards the formation of national identity. This makes it important for us to understand the course of development which contributed to the rise of Australian nationalism. Not by war or conquest but by choice, the people of Australia decided to form a federation at the end of the 19th century. This marked the birth of the Australian nation. This Unit introduces you to the emergence of nationalism in Australia and the issues confronted by it.

8.2   OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

● describe the historical antecedents of nationalism in Australia;

- understand the place of Aborigines in Australian nationalism; and

- define the challenges facing Australian Multiculturalism.

8.3 RISE OF NATIONALISM IN AUSTRALIA

In 1786 the decision of the British government to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay was the outcome of the problem that the government was facing with the over crowding in English jails. The American colonies used to be the dumping ground for the English criminals but the American independence in 1776 closed the gate of America for the English prisoners. The British had other imperial objectives in extending its empire towards the Botany Bay like the advantages of having access to New Zealand, the need for establishing a southern trading post, checking the French colonial advancement, etc. Added to this background was the spirit of discoveries and religious imperatives for colonisation. It was considered by the colonial powers their God-given duty to civilise and Christianise the colonised people. This was the beginning of the colonisation of Australia which had a sizable indigenous population known as the Aborigines. In the beginning non-Aboriginal Australians- both convicts and free migrants- came from Great Britain and Ireland. Dividing Australia into six separate colonies- Tasmania, Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland was the decision of England. Culturally as well as in all other administrative matters, the settlers in Australia considered themselves as part of the British tradition. In the 1850s, when the Australian colonies were granted internal self-government, they adopted the British practices and conventions in the making of their constitutions. However, it is suggested that from 1850s itself the thinking of defining an identity different from Britain started gaining ground in Australia. In this process the Eureka Rebellion of 1854 is considered as a major landmark towards the formation of an Australian identity.

The legendary Australian poet, Henry Lawson, through his literary work on Eureka Stockade and its hero Peter Lalor is said to have kindled the spirit of nationalism among the Australians. What happened at Eureka in 1854? Eureka was a site for gold mining at Victoria in Australia. As we know from the Australian History, there was a huge rush for gold in Australia with the news spreading of Australia's gold treasure. The gold miners faced a number of injustices because of the license system, the heavy cost of gold mining license and of having no political rights. To voice their grievances, the miners founded the Ballarat Reform League. The main agenda of the Reform League was to demand for a change in the management of the gold fields, abolition of the Diggers' and Storekeepers' license tax and democratic political reform. The seething discontent culminated in an organised battle of miners- under the leadership of Peter Lalor- against the government troops over the cost of licenses and other issues on December, 1854. Narrating this incident Mark Twain wrote:

> 'The Ballarat miners protested, petitioned and complained- it was of no use; the Government held its ground, and went on collecting the tax. And not by pleasant methods….By and by there was a result; and I think it may be called the finest thing in Australian history. It was a revolution- small in size, but great politically; it was a strike for liberty, a struggle for a principle, a stand against injustice and oppression….It is another instance of a victory won by a lost battle. It adds an honourable page to history; the people know it and are proud of it. They keep green the memory of the men who fell at the Eureka Stockade'. (Historical Studies: Eureka Supplement, Melbourne University Press, 1965, cited in // www.members.ozemail.com.au).

The rebellion of miners at Eureka is seen by many not merely as a protest of miners for justice but the assertion against Imperial interference and for an Australian identity. Ben Chifley, former

Prime Minister belonging to the Australian Labor Party, observed that 'Eureka was more than an incident or passing phase. It was greater in significance than the short-lived revolt against tyrannical authority would suggest. 'The permanency of Eureka in its impact on our development was that it was the first real affirmation of our determination to be masters of our own political destiny' (Historical Studies: Eureka Supplement). The miners carried a blue and white Southern Cross flag which later on was considered an important anti-establishment symbol. The rebel leader Peter Lalor who lost an arm was later acquitted and he became a member of the Legislative Council and its speaker.

Whatever way one interprets the Eureka rebellion the fact needs to be considered is that this incident clearly shows the growing consciousness among the settlers regarding an identity of their own which is identified with the land and environment of Australia. Compared to the initial phase from 1850s onwards, there was a visible change in the mindset of the Australians. The new generation of Australians who were born in this new land had different experiences in comparison to their predecessors. Their ties with the mother country got weakened and they became identified more with the culture of the new land. By the late 1880s there were nearly 3,000,00 population in Australia and two out of three were born in Australia. The sense of belonging to a separate country and having an identity different from 'home' was gaining ground. This process was further strengthened by the extension of free, secular education in all colonies in the 1870s. Publication of newspapers and journals provided an opportunity to give expression to the ideas of the new Australians. The Bulletin, founded in 1880, started writing against English governors and the Royal family. Through poetry, stories and anecdotes this journal gave vent to the genuine Australian sentiment. The Bulletin even questioned the teaching of history glorifying the British and the use of Australian troops in the Imperialist wars. Appeal was made to the Australians to have views and policies not as colonial Englishmen but as Australians. When the New South Wales press celebrated hundred years of British settlement in Australia, the Bulletin observed that the day of celebration should be 3rd December,1854, when 'Australia set her teeth in the face of the British lion at Eureka'. This quest for Australian identity is well reflected in the literature of Australia of that period.

In the rise of Australian nationalism by the late nineteenth century, 'the bush' legends had a significant contribution. Bush was identified with a place which is beyond the boundary of law and court. It was associated with wildness and lawlessness. The bushrangers were considered as the embodiment of the spirit of the diggers at the Eureka stockade and as anti-colonial and patriotic. The bush ballad is considered as the first notable Australian literary form. Adam Lindsay Gordon, for the first time, gave a new meaning to the ballad. Away from the city which represents 'ills of a derivative civilization', the bush ballads idealise an interior through local idioms which is distinctly characterised as Australian. The bush ballads were produced by an intelligentsia who lived in the city but whose hearts were in an imagined and romanticised interior. Most remembered that the literary figure for igniting the fire of Australian nationalism is Henry Lawson. He was born 13 years after Eureka in 1867 in a tent in the goldfields of New South Wales. He was a poet of the people and dreamt for an independent Australia ruled by Australians. He wanted the Australian children to learn to love the blue flag with the Southern Cross. Writing on poetical works of Lawson, David Wright observed that 'He was the voice of a new movement; the ringing, surging rebellion of his song echoed the unrest of the eighties and nineties…'. Starting from 1880-1910 in the pages of the Bulletin and other journals, Lawson wrote against the injustices of the establishment and voiced for freedom. The following excerpts from his poems truly reflect the nationalist spirit of Lawson.

'But not in vain those diggers died. Their comrades may rejoice,

For o'er the voice of tyranny is heard the peoples' voice

It says: reform your rotten law, the diggers wrongs make right

Or else with them our brothers now, we'll gather to the fight'(Eureka)

'Flag and banner of my dreams!

This time is not as it seems

And the tide of freedom streams

With the spirit of the people over all

We shall raise the bright flag yet-

Ne'er to falter or forget-

And 'twill go through many battles ne'er to fall' (Australia's Forgotten Flag).

For Lawson and many others, Eureka marked the beginning of Australia's striving for freedom from foreign rule and social justice. In the late 19th century, when Lawson through his literary works, influenced the growing patriotic sentiment of the Australians and contributed in promoting a native Australian culture, we find that there was a growing mobilisation of workers against the existing exploitative system of the government. In this formative phase of the labour movement in Australia, William Lane who came to Australia around 1885 at the age of 24 through his weekly labour paper, 'The Boomerang', asserted the voice for social justice and nationalism. He said, 'We are for this Australia, for the nationality which is creeping to the verge of being'. His organisational capacity and leadership quality helped in mobilising the labours in Queensland and by 1890, Queensland became the major centre of trade union movement in Australia. Although a major limitation in his thinking was his racist attitude which was against the principle of class solidarity, his concern was for white Australian workers and not for others. In spite of this limitation, his concern for social justice and fight and capitalism infused nationalist spirit among workers.

Thus by the end of the 19th century as a result of a number of developments in political as well as socio-cultural life in Australia, there was a strong urge for consolidation and establishment of a distinct Australian national identity. From 1870s onwards, as a result of steady development in education, communication, transport services and print media, the sense of isolation among the colonies in Australia was done away with. The linking of colonies also created the need for fiscal union, uniform legislature and a federation. All these resulted in the formation of a Federation in 1901 when the former colonies of New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania became states of the 'Commonwealth of Australia'. The British Monarch remained as the head of state in Australia with Lord Hopetoun, the Monarch's representative as Australia's new Governor General and Sir Edmund Barton became Australia's first prime Minister. The federation adopted White Australia as its primary objective stating its commitment to 'The cultivation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community'.(Stuart Macintyre, A Concise History of Australia). The adoption of White Australia policy by the new federation marked the beginning of the Australian nationalism by denying the natural rights of Aborigines (indigenous Australians) and other immigrants in Australia. In the road towards future progress and strengthening of Australian national identity, we will find that this exclusivist character of Australian nationalism posed major problem.

8.4   ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND AUSTRALIAN NATIONALISM

Aboriginal peoples constitute about two percent of around twenty million inhabitants of Australia. Prior to colonisation, Australia was the home of some 600 aboriginal groups who were members of different tribes. In the process of colonisation they were pushed in the periphery and they failed to get their rightful place in the formation of Australian nationalism. Looking in the history of Australian nationalism, it clearly emerges that the historical and cultural traditions of the indigenous peoples of Australia remained outside the domain of the 'imagined' Australian identity. However, recent studies on the Aborigines show that though indigenous people were forced into powerless positions yet they tried to raise their voice against injustice. Adam Shoemaker has observed that 'Since the earliest days- this extends back to Bennelong's letter to Lord Sudney's steward on 29th August 1796 — Aboriginal Australians have not been prepared to be passive recipients of injustice. Again and again they have forced the issue, pressed the point and lobbied far and wide. At times this approach has been a purely personal one.' (Adam Shoemaker, 'White on black/ black on black', in Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss (eds.), The Oxford Literary History of Australia, 1998.) Lynette Russell through the case study of an Aboriginal woman in the 1920s and 1930s, has drawn our attention to the complexity of the notion of national identity for indigenous Australians. She shows as to how the white Australia looked towards the aborigines in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and how the colonial government, through an Act, tried to assimilate and absorb the aboriginal people into the wider community. But it was not made clear in this process as to how to make the Aborigines citizens. Only by the 1940s and 50s, when it became clear that the Aboriginal people were not going to be completely wiped out, the white Australia started thinking of offering them civil rights and right to vote. They were recognised as citizens in 1967. Beginning with, the trade union congress passed resolutions calling for the exclusion of non-white migrants and Aboriginal workers were not given membership of trade unions. It was only in 1948, when the Communist party of Australia won control over trade unions that the discriminatory membership clause was removed. For the first time in 1965, the Arbitration Court ruled in favour of equal wages for Aborigines. The issue of major public debate is over the place of Aborigines within the framework of Australian nationalism. In 1988, at the time of bicentenary celebration of the European settlement in Australia, the Aborigines challenged the legitimacy of this celebration and also drew the attention of the people towards the untold past of Australia. The growing assertion of Aboriginal people over the years has forced the Australian government to take note of the rightful place of the Aborigines in the Australian political life. In 1992, the High Court of Australia, in its famous Mabo ruling, stated that the policy of 'terra nullius' i.e., before the arrival of the Europeans Australia was a land of uninhabited wilderness is not valid. This judgment recognises the native title which proves that before the coming of the Europeans, Aboriginal people were citizens with rights, responsibilities and obligations. The National Inquiry report titled as Bringing Them Home observes that since late-nineteenth century to the 1970s, a large number of Aboriginal children were removed from their mothers and this group is popularly known as 'Stolen Generation'. In the book titled as 'Aboriginal Workers', Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders have observed that essays in this book 'may prompt non-aboriginal workers to open their minds and hearts to consider learning from Aboriginal workers — to learn about this culture's less demarcated traditional work arrangements, where family, community, business, leisure, hunting and gathering were all given priority and highly valued. In a society such as ours, which puts paid work on a pedestal and child-rearing, nurturing the land and environment, caring for kin and community and even artistic production far lower, we could surely benefit by considering the challenges Aborigines have historically made to these hierarchies and boundaries.'(Ann McGrath

and Kay Saunders (eds.), Aboriginal Workers). All these developments point to the growing consciousness of the Aborigines about their suffering in the past and present and also their rightful claim in Australian national identity and history. Writing on the Aborigines and the notion of Australian national identity, Lynette Russell has observed, 'Aboriginal culture is not merely appropriated as part of the national agenda, but rather has become a key component of how Australians see themselves. I find this new nationalism troubling. The current desire to reconcile the different elements of Australian society is based on conservative ideals and Anglo-Australian values; for the most part, Aboriginal people themselves are either overlooked or given only token acknowledgment. National Australian citizenship has discovered a need to embrace aboriginal identity, but Australian nationalism still has little to offer Indigenous Australians'.(L.Russell, Public Records, Private Life: The Story of One Aboriginal Woman and Her Journey from Non-citizen to Citizen, in www.arts.monash.edu.au). Thus the way nationalism in Australia was imagined and constructed faces a major challenge on the question of how to negotiate with the indigenous roots of the Australian nation.

8.5 MULTICULTURALISM, HANSONISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

It is argued that till the Second World War, Australia was having people mainly born of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic stock. Since the Second World War various ethnic groups drawn from virtually every country in the world have migrated to Australia. In 1901, the colonies came together to create independent Commonwealth of Australia and the situation after 1950s did not remain the same. It is pertinent to understand in this context the dominance of Britishness in conceiving the Australian nationhood. By adopting the White Australia Policy, the early advocates of the Australian nationalism wanted to protect their organic bondage with the British race and its cultural heritage. Billy Hughes, a strident Australian nationalist in the early decades of the 20th century, emphasised on Australia's British self-image in the following words:

'Remember that this is the only community in the Empire, if not, indeed, in the world, where there is so little admixture of race. Do you realize that, if you go in England from one country to another, men speak with a different accent; that if you go a few miles men speak with a different tongue… Yet you can go from Perth to Sydney, and from Hobart to Cape York, and find men speaking the same tongue, with the same accent. Place on that bench men from Alice Springs, Cape York, Hobart, and Adelaide, and you can not distinguish them in speech, form or feature. We are all of the same race, and speak the same tongue in the same way… We are more British than the people of Great Britain, and we hold firmly to the great principle of the White Australia, because we know what we know' (The Power of Speech).

This identification of Australian cultural and political life with the British race began to change in the 1960s. Post-1960s clearly show a shift in defining Australian nationalism not exclusively in terms of its Britishness. Conscious efforts were made to integrate others who have so far remained outside the 'imagined Australian nation', primarily Aborigines and Asians within the domain of a new myth of Australian nationalism. 'Since the 1960s Australian Prime Ministers have wrestled with the question of what ideas of community are possible now that the once-powerful British story is no longer viable or, indeed, if real community is possible at all'.

Particularly in the context of increased immigration from Asian region and the contemporary forces of globalisation, the issue of multiculturalism and Hansonism has opened new debates on Australian nationalism. To begin with, the Australian leaders was very much influenced by the notion of cultural homogeneity and absolute racial unity which was clearly reflected in the adoption

of the White Australia Policy. In the post-Second World War period, changing the geopolitical circumstances prompted Australia to move closer to Asia and this compelled to rethink about its White Australia policy. A section of the Australian intellectuals expressed their disapproval of the racial component of Australian nationalism. This resulted in the search for a new rhetoric of nationalism for Australia in order to adapt it to the nation's changing circumstances. Thus Australia opted for the policy of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism explains the cultural and ethnic diversity of Australia. It is in the 1970s that multiculturalism first emerged in Australia in order to take care of ethnic pluralism within the national polity. The origin of multiculturalism is traced to the increasing global migration which resulted in the growth of multicultural societies all over the world. In 1989, the Australian government endorsed the policy for a multicultural Australia. The Principles of Australian multicultural policies are as follows:

- All Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia, to its interests and future, first and foremost;

- All Australians are required to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society- the Constitution and the rule of law, tolerance and equality, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as the national language and equality of the sexes; and

- That the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.'(UWS International, www.uws.edu.au/international/mcultural.html).

Thus the adoption of the policy of multiculturalism in Australia clearly suggests that in the context of current globalising realities, Australia has tried to negotiate with the existing cultural diversities of its citizens. However, in recent times, Australia witnessed the emergence of Pauline Hanson and 'One Nation' as a strong critique of changes within the country as a result of globalisation which is considered as a major threat to the Australian nationalism. Hanson is of the opinion that 'it was a world of "fat cats, bureaucrats and do-gooders" who took advantage of ordinary tax payers who effectively lost their money to the support of "Aborigines, multiculturalists and a host of minority groups", their taxes as well funding the increase in the "power and position" of already dominant groups'.(Bruce Kapferer, 'The Australian society of the State : Egalitarian Ideologies and new Directions in Exclusionary Practice' in Blurred Boundaries: Rethinking Culture in the Context of Interdisciplinary Practices, Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan, December 13-14, 2003,p.17). Starting from the late sixties to the present, the policy of liberalisation that the Australian government has adopted is believed to have contributed to the rise of Hanson and her party. The opening of Australia to immigrants from Asia and the Middle East and the advocacy of a policy of multiculturalism by the Australian Labor Party to ensure improved rights and recognition for ethnic minorities seem to have created a sense of threat to the Anglo-Celtic dominance and the pristine values of Australian nationalism. The Ideologues of One Nation also tried to make use of the distress faced by small business and small rural communities as a result of the decline of manufacturing industry and privatisation of government corporations. In this assertion of revitalisation of Australian nationalist ideology, the immediate opponents are Aborigines, new immigrants (Asian and Middle Eastern background) as well as refugees. Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey, is very critical of the multicultural policies of the 1980s which resulted in large scale immigration from South-East Asia to Australia. Blainey is apprehensive that the cultural differences originating out of multiculturalism and policies towards Aborigines would come in the way of formation of a coherent and harmonious Australian nation. The One Nation ideologues clearly demand the strengthening of Australian nationalism that centres on the Anglo-Celtic population. Commenting on Hanson and her 'One Nation Party', Bruce Kapferer has observed,

'Hanson and her followers had limited electoral success through a rhetoric which stressed the "basic values" of lower and middle income urban and rural communities. The appeal was to those presumed to be white and of British background or, in conceptions of more recent lineage constructed in the terms of post-colonialist, of Anglo-Celtic stock. The latter present-day ethnic conception asserts homogeneity of interest which, in the colonial and immediate postcolonial periods, was refused in view of enmities of bitter class, religious and national/political kinds. Hanson and her One Nation Party were antagonistic to Asian immigration, an open policy towards refugees, multiculturalism and to government programmes that were aimed to positively discriminate in favour of Aborigines and, in particular, Aboriginal land rights,.(Bruce Kapferer, The Australian Society of the State: Egalitarian Ideologies and New Directions in Exclusionary Practice). Thus, in the context of Australian nationalism, references to multiculturalism and Hansonism are essential to understand because the question of nationality has acquired new meaning with the changing circumstances in Australia.

8.6   AN OVERVIEW

What we find from the above narrative is that Australian nationalism emerged through a process which has certain distinct characteristics. Although the recorded history of Australia began with the European colonisation, the recent studies on Aborigines show that the indigenous people of Australia have a rich cultural tradition which is older than the European settlement. Different colonies followed different ways to emerge as independent nation-states. So far as Australia is concerned, the settled migrants who were initially mostly from Britain, gradually developed a bondage with the land of their settlement without forgetting their cultural ties with Britain. Spread in different colonies having different governments, all were tied with the mother country through race, religion and language. However, over the years with a slow growth of a sense of belonging with the new land of their settlement, the Europeans felt the urge of having an identity different from the identity of their mother country. The reasons for this quest for a new identity were many as we have explained in the analysis for the emergence of nationalism. Efforts for forming an Australian national identity did not face any challenge from the mother country and thus, through a mutual agreement, the six colonies of Australia came together in 1901 to form the Commonwealth of Australia. Thus it was shared Britishness as much as shared Australianness which enabled the formation of federal Australian Commonwealth. This story of Australian nationalism makes it different from the road towards nationalism in other countries. The way the national identity has been conceived and constructed in Australia left the space for discontent from the very beginning. Throwing off their tutelage and asserting its distinctiveness from the mother country, the white migrants could construct their national identity. But by leaving the indigenous people completely out from this project of nation building, the makers of Australian nationalism failed to foresee its future challenges. The racial overtone in visualising the new nation has made it vulnerable from the very beginning. Writing on this, Stuart Macintyre has observed that 'However much the settlers sought to attach themselves to the new homeland, they could not share it with those who were here first and they would not share it with others of the region. The insistence on exclusive possession operated on almost every aspect of foreign and domestic policy during the first half of the twentieth century, only to perpetuate the condition of insecurity, the feeling of being out of place, alone and exposed. Its legacy is apparent in the recent characterisation by an Indonesian journalist of Australians as the "white tribe of Asia".'(Stuart Macintyre, A Concise History of Australia). But with the growing assertion of the Aborigines for their rightful place in their own land and the migration of large number of people from Asian region in Australia, have made it impossible for Australia to ignore the ethnic diversity of contemporary Australia. Through multiculturalism and policy of reconciliation, Australian republic is trying to negotiate with the

issue of ethnic diversity although the Hanson phenomenon has posed new challenge to this endeavour.

8.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit, we have explained the background of the emergence of nationalism in Australia and the issues questioning the nature of Australian national identity. Each state has gone through different processes before it could establish its national identity. In case of Australia you have seen that primarily the British settlers coming to Australia in the late 18th century consolidated their control over Australia by pushing the local population to the periphery. It is these settlers who, over the years, developed a bonding with the new land and through various means developed an identity independent of their mother land. This culminated in the formation of the Federation of Australian Commonwealth in 1901. In the formation of this national identity the indigenous Australians, classified by the colonisers as the Aborigines, were kept out of the mainstream political domain. This however could not silence the Aborigines and very rightly they are questioning their marginalisation in their own land. Even the migrants from Asia who also contributed in the making of Australia have raised their voice for a rightful place within the Australian nation state. The challenge before the Australian nation state is how to negotiate with the claims of the Aborigines and the Asian migrants and to accept them with equal right and respect.

8.8 EXERCISES

1) Give a brief account of Australian Nationalism.

2) Explain the Aboriginal Peoples' Nationalism in Australia.

3) Describe the significant characteristics of multiculturalism and national identity in Australia.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Stephen Alomes and Catherine Jones (ed.), *Australian Nationalism: A Documentary History,* 1991

W.G.McMinn, *Nationalism and Federalism in Australia,* 1994

Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity* 1688-1980

Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*

Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss (eds.), *The Oxford Literary History of Australia,* 1998.

R.M.Younger, *Australia and the Australians: A New Concise History,* 1970