UNIT 13  COLONIALISM AND ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES

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13.1  INTRODUCTION

Modern historians call the period from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century 'the age of modern imperialism.' The term 'imperialism' was coined by Benjamin Disraeli in 1872 in the context of the British general election of 1874. Among the critics of imperialism the most famous names are those of J. A. Hobson, a British liberal, and V.I. Lenin, the Russian Marxist leader of the Bolshevik revolution.

More accurately, the age should be called 'the age of colonial empires.' In the second half of the nineteenth century Karl Marx and Frederick Engels used the term 'colonialism.' Hobson was the first to pick up the term 'imperialism' for criticism from the economic angle and was followed by a host of political economists and historians in a vigorous debate that has not yet ended.

Imperialism, in the pure sense, is a political concept signifying power of one country above others. In the pure sense 'colonialism' is a demographic concept signifying the presence of a population in a foreign country. Of course, when a population lives in a country other than its
own original country on terms of the local population they are usually called ‘aliens’ or ‘immigrants’ or ‘minorities.’ It is only when a foreign population dominates the local population in terms of number or power or both they are usually called ‘colonisers.’ Of course, that entails a relation of power and, in social sciences, power over others is considered political power. But that may not be imperial power unless there is a ‘centre’ abroad from which that power is derived. On the other hand, imperial rule needs the presence of personnel of the imperial government, even if temporarily, in the subject country. Both colonialism and imperialism, however, have strong economic contents.

13.2 THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF MODERN COLONIALISM

13.2.1 The Economics of Colonialism

Both colonisation and empire building are ancient practices. Ancient Greece and Rome had both colonies and empires though empires meant a bigger territory than colonies. Such colonisation was backed by the ‘home county’ that, in turn, derived revenues from the colonies. In the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries began a vigorous colonisation drive of the European powers in search of land and natural resources like gold. The continents of America and Africa fell victim to it. Later Asia and Australia came under the spell of the drive. ‘In the last half of the Seventeenth Century,’ we are told by the British historian G.M. Trevelyan, ‘England’s statesmen and merchants put a high value on her American colonies.’ He writes:

'The overseas possessions were valued as fulfilling a twofold purpose. First as supplying an appropriate outlet for the energetic, the dissident, the oppressed, the debtors, the criminals, and the failures of old England – a sphere where the energies of men who were too good or too bad not to be troublesome at home, might be turned loose to the general advantage; as yet there was no pressing question of a purely economic excess of population in England. Secondly, the colonies were valued as markets where raw materials could be bought, and manufactured articles sold, to the advantage of England’s industry and commerce.'

In the late eighteenth century, however, the thirteen British colonies in North America seceded from the empire and, though soon they called themselves ‘states’, they remained colonies all the same. having annihilated or pushed into ‘reservations’ their original inhabitants. In the Portuguese and the Spanish colonies of Latin America the process was more or less the same but there was some mixture. The growth of what Eric Hobsbawm called ‘Creole nationalism’ backed by the United Kingdom and the United States led to their secession from the respective empires in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the United Kingdom emerged as the biggest colonial empire of the world. The British Crown took over the administration of India in 1858 from the English East India Company. Soon it granted local autonomy to her white colonies while her financial grip over their economies remained more or less intact. Netherlands and France had colonial possessions in South-East Asia and Africa. Even the new state of Belgium acquired a colony in Africa’s Congo. Immense rivalry for colonial possessions in Africa broke out in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when Germany joined the race. The result, finally, was World War 1.
13.2.2 Patterns of Cotonisation

In 1865 Marx noted three kinds of colonies

1) The Plantation Colonies as in the West Indies.

2) The Well-Populated Countries like Mexico and India.

3) The 'Colonies Proper' like Australia.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Engels added to the list the colonies 'subsidiary to the stock markets' as in Africa.

Though several British historians have vouched that the flag followed trade, to Marx the early trade of Europe in general and Britain in particular was a part of the process of primitive accumulation of industrial capital. The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signified the rosy dawn of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.

The different moments of primitive accumulation distributed themselves, more or less in chronological order, particularly over Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England. In England at the end of the 17th century, they arrived at a systematical combination, embracing the colonies, the national debt, the modern mode of taxation, and the protectionist system. These methods depended in part on brute force, e.g., the colonial system. But they all employed the power of the State, the concentrated and organised force of society, to hasten, hot-house fashion, the process of transformation of feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power. Brute force backed by the State and economic manoeuvres against the subordinated countries are the salient features of capitalist colonialism in Marx's view. Quoting from the British Parliamentary proceedings, Marx showed that England did not actually pay for her imports from India because England paid for it by 'good government'. He wrote:

"India alone has to pay 5 million in tribute for "good government," interest and dividend on British capital etc., not counting the sum sent home annually by officials as savings from their salaries, or by English merchants as part of their profit to be invested in England. Every British colony continually has to make large remittances for the same reason. Most of the banks in Australia, the West Indies, and Canada, have been founded with English capital; and the dividends are payable in England. In the same way, England owns many foreign securities - European, North American and South American - on which it draws interest. In addition to this it has interest in foreign railways, canals, mines, etc., with corresponding dividends. Remittance on all these items is made almost exclusively in products over and above the amount of English exports. On the other hand what is sent from England to owners of English securities abroad and for consumption by Englishmen abroad is insignificant in comparison".

By the middle of the nineteenth century colonialism became integrated with what Marx called 'the expanded mode of capitalist production,' through lending and investment abroad. Banks and stock exchanges were the chief instruments of this strategy. These were the points highlighted by Lenin in his elaboration of (capitalist) imperialism.
13.2.3 Debate on Imperialism

Colonial imperialism always had two kinds of justification. One was that it was 'the white man's burden' – acivilising mission to the benefit of the backward countries. Another was that it was unintended – merely forced by circumstances that hindered free trade of the West. In 1961 Robinson and Gallagher brought out the thesis that Britain generally did business with the non-European world through collaborators. It was only when such collaborators were not found, or turned into adversaries that she would annex their territories. Further, Britain's African annexations were primarily to safeguard trade routes to India. Gallagher's Indian student, Anil Seal, went ahead of this thesis to declare that the annexation of India by Britain had been primarily for safeguarding her trade route to the East Indies.

Serious debate on colonial imperialism had started at the beginning of the twentieth century with J. Hobson blaming economic imperialism of benefiting a handful of capitalists in England and not the traders or the common men. In 1917 Lenin held economic imperialism to be the highest state of capitalism that had divided the entire world among the Western hegemons and caused World War I. He identified the growth of monopoly, the union of industrial capital and finance capital, and export of capital to colonies as the chief features of this stage of capitalism.

In 1919, however, the liberal German economist, J.A. Schumpeter, offered a 'sociological theory' of imperialism denying any necessary connection between capitalism and imperialism. He saw imperialism as flowing from atavistic, feudalistic mentalities and certain pre-capitalist social structures.

Lenin's critics have challenged Lenin mainly on the third point about imperialism – namely export of capital to the colonies. They offer statistics to show that the bulk of the British foreign investments were in her self-governing Dominions (white colonies) and the independent Latin American countries but not to India. It was only after World War II that, Britain started investing in Africa for 'development'. In a way, this criticism of Lenin strengthens Marx's argument about colonies being the source of primitive accumulation. But Lenin cannot be faulted for ignoring the aspect of exploitation of raw materials as a major purpose of colonisation. Rather, he gave a dynamic dimension to this aspect by stressing that it was a continuous need of developed capitalism. According to him, the more capitalism developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt, the more intense the competition and hunt for sources of raw materials throughout the whole world, the more desperate the struggle for acquisition of colonies.

Exploitation of raw materials and marketing of finished products have been found to be the chief features of colonial imperialism by even the non-Marxist historians. The early political economists of India like Dadabhai Naoroji, M.G. Ranade and R.C. Dutt highlighted this aspect of direct exploitation of the subject people by the colonial powers causing poverty to the subject people in India.

It should, on the other hand, be noted that Britain's white colonies, after the American Revolution, were given an amount of autonomy that the North American colonies had never enjoyed. Further, a few years after the American Revolution, Britain mended her fence with the United States of America. The Monroe Doctrine of 1812 excluded all other European powers from competition with Britain and the USA over Latin American soil. Latin America grew into a virtual colony.
13.2.4 Social Impact of Colonialism

The major impact of colonialism was unquestionably economic. But it had its social bearing too. R. Robinson, virtually the founder of the 'Cambridge School' of colonial history, validly insisted on the role of 'collaborators' in the operation of early trade and colonialism. The operation naturally affected the social linkages among the subject people and even their demography. In some colonies the native people were virtually annihilated or cornered. In some places racial mixing took place and in some — the heavily populated ones — the cultural orientations of the people were affected. Some of the subject people took to what they found to be a course toward modernisation and some others responded in a conservative way. In most of the cases, however, the responses were mixed, partly modernistic in certain spheres and partly conservative in certain others.

The important point is that the collaborators changed from time to time, an old group becoming frustrated grew critical and even hostile to the rulers, while new groups are recruited. This collaboration or opposition to the colonial rule, however, did not flow from modernism or conservatism as such although the conservatives occasionally protested against some of the modernist moves of the colonial regimes. The early attempts of the West to establish their power over the Afro-Asian countries were all resisted by the colonial people, the outstanding example being what the British called 'the Indian mutiny'. The colonial Governments and their historians saw such 'revolts' as conservative opposition to their progressive, welfare activities. Some anthropologists have called them 'primary resistance movements'.

13.3 CASE STUDIES IN COLONIALISM

A brief picture of colonialism and anti-colonial struggles over the non-European continents will illustrate the points made above.

13.3.1 Colonialism in America

Colonialism began in the American continents with the arrival of Spain and Portugal close on the heels of Columbus. By the intervention of the Pope to whom both Spain and Portugal paid their obeisance because of their Catholic faith the world was divided for colonisation with the hemisphere west from Brazil onward falling to Portugal and the hemisphere east of Brazil falling to Spain. Spain occupied Mexico and much of its northern territory now belonging to the USA. The two countries were followed by the British and the French colonialists. The British colonialists eventually emerged more successful than the others by considerably displacing the French and the Spanish colonisers or capturing their territories. The thirteen 'New England' colonies, however, seceded from the empire in 1776. On the other hand Canada emerged as the loyalist colony north of the USA and was rewarded with substantial autonomy in 1867. To satisfy the unhappy subjects of French origin Canada was also granted a federal system of government. The French colonial rule was confined to a few Caribbean islands to raise rich plantations there.

In the early nineteenth century, with the indirect support of Britain and the USA, the Latin American countries declared independence. In 1812 President Munro of the USA declared that no European power would be allowed to come back to the continent. Political influence of the USA and economic influence of Britain reduced the Latin American states into dependencies of Britain and the USA with unstable political systems frequently headed by dictators. Their
plantations and mines, particularly oil, came under Anglo-US control through virtual monopoly over their export trade. It was only after World War II that revolts against this kind of political economy took place in Cuba, Chile, Argentina and certain other countries. Except in Cuba, however, none of these revolutions sustained.

13.3.2 Colonial Imperialism in South and South-East Asia

By the beginning of the nineteenth century South Asia, including India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka of today) was under British control. Yet in India this authority was technically exercised by the English East India Company as tenants of the Delhi's Mughal ruler. In 1857 that ruler was overthrown and in 1858 Victoria, Queen of England, took over the territory and government of British India. About a third of the sub-continent, however, was allowed to remain nominally independent under the native Princes. In 1877 Queen Victoria was proclaimed the Empress of India and the princely states were brought under the 'paramountcy' of the British Crown.

Coastal Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was occupied from the Dutch in 1796, the inlands in 1815. Between these years Ceylon was administered as a part of the Madras Presidency. In 1815 it was turned into a Crown Colony. While India was regarded as the Jewel of the Crown by the British, because of India's vast and various economic resources, Ceylon was developed essentially as a plantation colony.

By 1886 Burma (Myanmar) was annexed to huge benefit of the empire in terms of her forest, oil and agriculture. Britain tried to annex Afghanistan but was thwarted by Tsarist Russia. A large part of her territory was, however, annexed to British India in 1902.

Further east the British, the French and the Dutch competed for territories and came to divide South-East Asia as follows: Malaysia, including Singapore and Hongkong for the British, Indonesia for the Dutch and Indo-China including Cambodia (Kampuchia of today), Laos and Vietnam for the French. Except for China within Vietnam, the French allowed limited political autonomy to the dynastic rulers but exercised full economic control over Indo-China.

13.3.3 Anti-Colonial Struggles in South-East Asia

After a revolt in 1848 Ceylon made peace with the empire. In 1931 it was granted universal adult franchise that the British never granted the Indians. Ceylon's progress to independence was constitutionalist led by its educated elite influenced partly by the Indian National Congress and partly by the ideology of international socialism.

Burma was treated as a backyard of British India of which it remained a part till 31 March 1937. It was denied the 'Reforms' of 1919 that had created a diarchy in the other provinces of British India. Its middle class, based mostly in the fertile Irrawaddy Valley, moved for the kind of reforms at par with those provinces. It was granted some amount of local autonomy after being separated from British India in 1937.

The British did not establish a Crown Colony in what they saw as 'the Malay Peninsula' as such. The basis of their power was a 'protectorate system' created through treaties with the...
local rulers recognising the 'sovereignty' but taking over their administration. Although most of its Chinese and Indian settlers had strong links with the Kuomintang, the Communist Party of China and the Indian National Congress, the local Malays became politically active only after World War II, following Japanese withdrawal, when the British proposed to set up a Malay Union.

The French governed most of Indo-China (Cambodia, Laos, Annam and Tonkin) as protectorates. In 1945 the anti-Japanese resistance forces, led by the Communist Party of Indo-China, declared the formation of Vietnam as a republic giving start to one of the most notorious civil wars in history involving the Western powers, particularly the USA.

13.3.4 Japan and the USA

The story of colonialism in south and East Asia will not be complete without reference to the rise of the Japanese empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. Japan first clashed with Britain in 1902 and with Tsarist Russia in 1904. She occupied Korea in 1905 and annexed it in 1911. It fought World War I on the Allied side with imperialist ambition over China and the Pacific region. In 1931 it actually invaded Manchuria. During World War II she joined the axis powers and invaded South-East Asia advancing as far as the eastern borderland of British India. This helped the growth of nationalist movements in South-East Asia and loosened the control of the European powers over the region. Even the USA occupied the Philippines in 1898 and held it till 1946.

13.3.5 Colonialism in the Asiatic Empires

The rest of the Asian continent was, almost wholly, within three empires: China, Tsarist Russia and Turkey. Here a distinction should be made between colonies and the outlying parts of an empire. The former are geographically disjoined from the mainland, the latter are not. The Chinese and the Russian empires and, to a lesser extent, the Turkish Empire were geographically compact. All of them were, however, subject to territorial aspirations of the European colonial powers.

From the Opium War of 1840, which the British fought in order to obtain the right of 'free trade' in Opium in China to the beginning of World War I China was forced to sign as many as 17 'unequal treaties' with the Western powers and Japan turning that country into a virtual dependency of those powers.

Russia was somehow able to resist the Anglo-French designs on her territory and even wrested an area of influence in Iran from Britain in 1907 though Britain retained a virtual monopoly over the huge recently discovered oil resources in there. After World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution transformed this empire into a multi-national federation (which collapsed in 1990).

After World War I, however, the Turkish Empire was shattered and its West Asian possessions were mandated by the League of Nations to Britain and France. Of these territories Saudi Arabia was granted independence in 1932. After World War II the rest of the Arab countries were turned into Trust territories and placed under the controls of Britain and France. By the 1950s they were declared independent.
13.3.6 Colonialism in Africa

Next to Latin America, Africa was the worst sufferer. North of Sahara Egypt was the most advanced part of the continent. It could not be conquered by any European power though Britain and, to a lesser extent, France acquired considerable influence and control on that country. During World War I, in 1914, Britain declared a protectorate over Egypt provoking mass resentment and demonstrations. The protectorate was renounced by Britain in 1922 but continued British pressure on that country led to the signing of an unequal Anglo-Egyptian Treaty in 1936 enabling Britain to occupy the Suez Canal and some other territories. Egypt's neighbours, Sudan and Ethiopia, were under still greater influence of the colonial powers. Tunisia, Algeria, a part of Morocco and a huge contiguous territory in central and western Africa fell to the French but a greater part of the continent went to Britain. Spain, Italy, Belgium and Germany were the other owners of Africa.

The 'trade' that attracted the West to Africa was initially in slaves. Subsequently, ivory took the 'explorers' deep into the continent. Some missionaries joined them, got killed by the local people and facilitated the arrival of the military might of the West in the continent. By the middle of the nineteenth century, European powers were aware of the diamond, gold and other precious minerals in Africa. They engaged themselves in hectic diplomatic activities to divide Africa and, about the end of the nineteenth century, started sharing the territories among themselves. It was this 'scramble for Africa' that highlighted the character of capitalist imperialism.

13.4 PATTERNS OF ANTI COLONIAL MOVEMENTS

It was the sense of being deprived and exploited that disillusioned the subject peoples. After the establishment of the colonial rule the modernist elite took the lead in opposing the colonial rule. They sought to unite the people on one platform and demanded of the rulers the right to be heard and be equally treated. Their tone was initially moderate, but later extremist wings grew up out of frustration. For three decades beginning from the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, revolutionary nationalist movement (that the British called 'terrorist') was powerful in India. During and after World War II violent strategies were widely followed in the anti-colonial movements in Asia and Africa.

There remained collaborators of the ruling regimes across the conservative and the modernist camps as there were opponents from both the segments of the native societies. Needless to mention that the collaborators were the beneficiaries and the opponents were the disillusioned people at a given time. Nevertheless anti-colonial movements kept in growing, though not necessarily in similar ways.

13.4.1 India as the Model

The Indian National Congress that sought to unite the Indians on a loyal but critical platform drew into its fold the elite from all sections of the Indian society and even some compassionate European subjects of the British Raj. Its leadership was essentially upper middle class professional, but it included and was backed by several landlords and adversary of the Raj. At the end of the nineteenth century emerged an extremist wing a section of which resorting to revolutionary violence. After World War I Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi turned the Indian National Congress into a mass party and, through a non-violent resistance, challenged the might of the British Empire. Notwithstanding the departure of several early groups from its fold the strength of the...
Indian National Congress increased steadily so much so that the British had to hand over power to this organisation. A very special kind of combination mass politics and 'constitutionalism' was the characteristic of this struggle.

The Indian National Congress was the first organisation of its kind in the entire colonial world. In several ways it was followed in the other colonies, particularly in South-East Asia. After World War I, this nationalist trend developed linkages with the socialist world and its ideology to different degrees. During World War II even Japanese imperialism, in its conflict with the Western powers, came to the aid of the nationalist movements in South-East and South Asia.

In most of Africa, sometime after the failure of 'primary resistance,' anti-colonial movements began, under the leadership of the modernist elite, after World War I but it became strong after World War II.

### 13.4.2 The Sacred Versus the Secular

In the 1880s a religion-based, prophetic, anti-colonial struggle broke out in Sudan – the Mahdist (deliverer). In certain other parts of the Muslim world a revival of the puritanic Wahabi movement took place. The combined effect of these movements was the rise of pan-Islamism. Its anti-West tenor combined with the Muslim resentment on the humiliation of the Sultan of Turkey, the Khalifat of the Islamic world, to produce the Khilafat agitation that had a great impact in India and Afghanistan.

In the Muslim world, however, pan-Islamism had an adversary in pan-Arabism. In several Arab countries there was resentment against the Turkish Empire. During World War I this resentment was encouraged and made use of by the British who found Turkey in the opposite camp led by Germany. The result was the creation of a number of 'mandated territories' for the Arabs under the Anglo-French aegis after World War I. The discovery of oil in West Asia contributed a great deal towards this arrangement.

It was before World War I, in 1907-08, that a secular nationalist movement grew in Turkey by the name of the Young Turk. But the movement was chauvinistic – concerned with the revival of the imperial glory of Turkey – and fell out with the Arab movements.

In the period between the two world wars, on the other hand, secular nationalist movements grew within the Turkish Empire. In Turkey itself Kamal Ataturk overthrew the Turkish monarchy. In Egypt the Wafd Party won elections but was kept out of office by the combined effort of the Egyptian ruler and his British aides.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century organised black African workers went on strike in several mining centres. Students and, interestingly, Christian church leaders took lead in organising a pan-African movement. The first Pan-African Congress met in London in 1919. But Pan-Africanism remained more an idea than a realisable goal. The National Congress of British West Africa was founded in 1920. Other organisations like the Central Kikiyu Association in Kenya and African National Congress in South Africa followed suit. As the borders of the African colonies had been arbitrarily drawn and tribal affinities were strong among the local people, efforts were also made to develop a pan-African consciousness. However, it was only after World War II, in which African soldiers had taken a great part that such movements became
strong and militant. The imperialist powers unleashed racist repression throughout Africa but had ultimately to give in.

13.5 SUMMARY

Though primarily colonialism has a geographical and a political connotation, both the systems were grounded in strong economic motives. Modern colonialism started in the fifteenth century and came to its climax in the late nineteenth century when imperialism virtually became a creed of the developed capitalist countries of the West. Its essential purpose was to acquire the natural resources of the subject countries and to develop them as captive markets for their finished products. The resulting conflicts produced two world wars.

The subject countries first offered primary resistance to the conquerors. Such resistance was conservative and, often, imbued with religious emotions but they did not succeed. The colonial-imperial powers often ruled with the assistance of collaborators. But the scope for such collaboration was limited and the disillusioned elite of the colonies ultimately united to oppose the ruling powers. Anti-colonial struggles became powerful in Asia after World War I and in Africa after World War II. By the 1970s the process of de-colonisation of the world was completed.

13.6 EXERCISES

1) Discuss Marx's view of colonialism.

2) Discuss Lenin's View of imperialism and its critiques.

3) Analyse the colonial formations in South and South-East Asia and the anti-colonial struggles in this region.

4) Analyse colonialism and anti-colonial struggles in Africa.

5) Discuss the role of religion in anti-colonial struggles.