 UNIT 4  ROMANTIC NATIONALISM AND FORMATION OF INDIAN REGIONAL IDENTITIES

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to

- Understand the concept of nation and nationalism;
- Know the difference between national identity and regional identity and the formation of regional identities in India;
- Explain the meaning of Romanticism and Romantic nationalism; and
- Understand that folklore played an important role in preserving the narratives of German, Finnish and Indian nationalism.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The formation of human identities, be it a folk identity, national identity, or regional identity, comes within the broad spectrum of polygenetic theories. As suggested by the name, ‘polygenetic theories’ is the opposite to ‘monogenesis theories’, implying that there are multiple ways to derive the theories of human origination and ipso facto, or the very fact that, the formation of human identities is on the
basis of language, culture, folklore, etc. Also referred to as ‘multiple-origin theories’, polygenetic theories imply that, ‘the pidgins and creoles of the world did not evolve from a common ancestor or proto-pidgin but rather developed separately from one another with different starting points. Structural similarities are thus the result of parallel but independent developments of the world’s pidgins and creoles’ (http://www.ello.uos.de>filed.php). Hummel (2000) explained that a pidgin language develops in a situation where different groups of people require some means of communication but lack any common language and thus formed a contact language. For example, some pidgin languages came into existence between masters and slaves on former European-owned plantations in the Caribbean or between slaves themselves, who were often separated from others of their linguistic group to lessen revolts. A Creole language arises “when a pidgin becomes the mother tongue of a speech community” is developed mostly because ‘the speakers of a pidgin are put in a position where they can no longer communicate by using their mother tongues’; secondly, a pidgin becomes so “useful in a community that it may be expanded and used even by people who share a mother tongue” (Ibid.).

The rationale of polygenism of human origins and identities, when transported to folklore implies that folklores of the world do not originate from the same source, as we have diverse folk, national or regional identities that have developed at various places and times. Besides the polygenetic character of folklore, the traditional beliefs, customs, and stories of a community are also passed through the generations by word of mouth. Hence, a body of popular myths or beliefs relating to a particular place, activity, or group of people also played an important role in catalysing the spirit of nationalism and in preserving the narratives of nationalism. We shall learn this in the following discussions.

Prof. Strobel wrote, ‘If we want to walk safely into the future, then we will have to walk upon the firm soil of our folklore.’ In the following case, we shall try to understand that folklore had played a tremendous role in catalysing the German, Finnish, and Indian national consciousness and in preserving the narratives of their nationalism. Nationalism in India has often caused the creation of strong regional identities that consisted of regional identities, marginal in the national sense. This political and cultural freedom, that were, is often vividly captured in the folklores. This will be also determined in this unit.

**4.2 CONCEPTS OF NATION AND NATIONALISM**

Nation and nationalism are two different concepts but with undeniable relationships between them. Many tend to build the interrelationships between the two concepts predominantly from a political perspective even though various other perspectives like cultural, linguistic, religious and economic, all are an intertwining part of the discourse. The term nation which stems from the Latin verb *nasci*, meaning ‘to be born’, refers to a relatively large group of genetically unrelated people with high solidarity (Hechter 10-11). “The past traditions of a nation have been articulated in terms of history, culture, language, folklore, territory or religion to demonstrate its antiquity and continuity,” states Karna (75). Nations, therefore, always give a distinct identity to a group of people from certain other groups. It is a relatively large and territorially concentrated ethnic group with a sense of common history and a putative homeland (Hechter 19).
Nation constitutes a subset of ethnic groups; they are territorially concentrated ethnic groups (like the Quebecois and the Kurds), rather than ethnic groups (like American Jews, Algerians in France) who are spatially dispersed in each state (Ibid.14). However, this definition of nation is just one aspect, in precise terms the political aspect, of the concept of nation. As concluded by Hugh Seton-Watson, there devised the ‘scientific definition’ of the term nation even though the phenomenon of it has existed and exists (cited in Anderson 3). Keeping in mind that there can be no universal definition of the term nation (Anderson 6), nation is as an ‘imagined political community because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.’

Anderson further stated that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.” He shows that nations were not the determinate products of given sociological conditions such as language or race or religion; they had been ‘imagined’ into existence everywhere in the world (183, cited in Karna 79) Some scholars like Ernest Renan further argue that “nations are not something eternal. Rather they depend on a constant popular affirmation and re-affirmation: a nation’s existence is a daily plebiscite” (cited in Pecora 24). In other words, the concept of nation is dynamic and not perennial. “Nation is a named community of history and culture, possessing a unified territory, economy, mass education system and common legal rights” (Smith 334).

However, apart from the elements such as history, culture, common memories and glories, language, folklore and so on, that make a nation; another very significant feature of a nation is the ‘subjective consciousness of oneness’ and the will of the people to be called and recognised as a nation. According to Radha Krishnan, “A nation is not a juxtaposition of individuals. It is a society based on community of mind and union of heart” (Nuh 140). For instance, the will of the Swiss people to be united, despite their diverse languages, is a much more important fact than a similarity of language, often obtained by persecution (Renan 171).

Nationalism, on the other hand, is an ‘ideological movement’ to attain and to maintain the autonomy, unity, and identity of the existing or potential nation (Smith 335). “It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round,” argued Ernest Gellner (cited in Karna 75). Unfortunately in some cases, nationalism across the globe creates the factor that stimulates a strong feeling of dislike of other people, which sometimes led to ethnic cleansing and even genocide. Some examples of such instances are the Jewish holocaust, ethnonational related violent conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, East Timor, Rwanda, Somalia, Northern Ireland, and Israel-Palestine, etc. “Thus, nationalism is perceived as an ideology of unusual force, an instrument of political manipulation” (Karna 76).

It is popularly argued that nationalism, which is, above all being, ‘political’, is the attempt of culturally distinct people, to attain political self-determination (Hechter 6-7). Indeed, ‘nation-or nationalism is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time’, stated Anderson (3). The mere existence of a nation that does not crave its own independent state apparatus poses no threat
Both the concepts of nation and nationalism again cannot be comprehended without connecting it to the institution of ‘State’. Seton-Watson (1977) discussed that “a state is a legal and political organisation, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens. A nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness (of that particular state).” A state ‘embodies nations and the aspiration for realising such embodiment, wherein a nation would have its state, is nationalism. Seton-Watson, in his effort to rid the complexities surrounding the term nationalism, gave two meanings: the first “is a doctrine about the character, interests, rights and duties of nations. The second meaning is an organised political movement, designed to further the alleged aims and interests of nations.” He further stated the two most important aims of nationalism movements have been ‘independence – the creation of a sovereign state in which the nation is dominant, and national unity, the incorporation within the frontiers of this state of all groups which are considered, by themselves, to belong to the nation.’

Check Your Progress 1

Notes: 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;

Question 1: How is the concept of nation and nationalism interrelated?


4.2.1 National Identity vs. Regional Identity

Regional identity comprises a narrower and smaller concept in the face of the larger and broader national or international identity. In other words, when a regional identity is discussed vis-a-vis a nation-state or a country, then its concept is narrower and smaller than a national identity, however, it has a strong and distinctive flavour. Nonetheless, the formation of both these identities, national and regional is based on geographical area and depending on the area; regional identity can be quite broad (someone could be from EU, ASEAN, SAARC regions) or more specific (someone could be from Southern India, Northeast India, or Central India, etc.).

In this section, by regional identity, we are looking within the national arena. In the national arena, regional identity or regionalism always forms a smaller part of the nation-state marked by homogeneity in terms of language, culture, religion,
and community of economic and other interests (Kumar 120). Regionalism in India is deeply rooted in its manifold diversity of languages, cultures, tribes, religions, communities, etc. (121). National identity is based on specific features—culture, tradition, language, religion, and politics—of a particular nation-state or country. Regional identity can never be discounted as it has its own uniqueness and flavour that leads to the larger national flavour.

It is through the social process that the ideology of nationalism was spread, the composition of its bases determined, and the functioning of its cultural symbols handled. Representations of national and regional identity often focus on certain strong characteristics and customs associated with the nation-state or region. Representations of the region can include the costume or dress, accents and dialects, folk customs, etc. of a particular place. M. N. Karna (90) has defined a region as a geographical unit with two broad facets which can be identified as the physical and the social; the first has existed since the beginning of time, the second has acquired its shape through thousands of years of human history.

A region is located between a community and a nation-state and although the geographical distinctiveness is a significant determinant of a region. This is indicative that a region may also be identified in cultural, linguistic, economic, and administrative terms (Karna 90). J. Pohl (2001) also discussed at length that regional identity is located between the national and the local level and thus it is a kind of spatial identity on a certain scale called the meso-level. Regionalism represents the search for “rootedness and belonging and the valorisation of local distinctiveness” in the face of the universalizing features of the nation-state.

Specificity of characteristics of a particular group of people occupying a particular geography is the marker of any regional identity. Sometimes a region even demands for an alternative nationality. In the concept of regional identity, the feeling of ‘we’ and ‘other’ sometimes become identified. ‘Regionalist practices are constructed with reference to an ‘other’ in inherently exclusionary ways (Tomaney 2020). Regional identity has a tendency of giving way to ‘narrow loyalties’ within the larger national loyalty. Sometimes after the wave of ‘state-building nationalism’ subsides because of achieving the independent or the sovereign status; the issue of ‘peripheral nationalism’ takes over and this mostly occurs as a protest by a culturally, racially, linguistically, and religiously distinct group of people against the direct rule or hegemony of the newly independent ‘nation-state’.

Peripheral nationalism seeks to bring about national self-determination by separating the nation from its host state. Regional identity can get embodied to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories in each state. It is the result of the conscious efforts of central rulers to make a multicultural population culturally homogeneous.”

Regional identity remains a dynamic process, which is developed, practised, and influenced simultaneously by both the inhabitants of a region and the state and the world.” We will discuss this more in the later sections.
Check Your Progress 2

Notes:  1) Your answers should be 50 words long;

        2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;

Question 2: What is national and regional identity?

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4.3 ROMANTICISM AND ROMANTIC NATIONALISM

‘Symbols’, which may be a myth or real, are the capstone of romanticism and romantic nationalism. Smith maintained that without ‘myth-symbol complexes’ which generate and express ethnic identity, modern nationalism would be rootless and arbitrary (cited in Karna 78). Romanticism is a cultural movement that reflects the feelings, mindsets, and worldviews of people regarding various spheres of life affairs i.e., politics, customs, traditions, religion, love, nature, economy, children, family, etc. Romanticism literally refers to the birth of a new set of ideas’ and is considered one of the most important historical events of all times.

Romanticism was an international artistic and philosophical movement that flourished in the late 18th to early 19th century. In fact, the epoch from the French Revolution to World War I comprises what is known as the Romantic Era (John Miles, hunsmire.tripod.com). Romanticism began in Western Europe in the middle of the 18th century in the work of artists, poets, and philosophers, and subsequently spread all over the world; changing how people look at nature, children, love, sex, money, and work. Romanticism is best understood as a reaction to the birth of the modern world, within some of its key features of industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation, and consumerism. It is also a reaction to the dramatic changes arising out of the Industrial Revolution of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Romanticism is not against logical thinking or scientific approach however they emphasise humanitarian values, such as emotion, intuition, mystical feelings, sympathy, empathy, love, respect, and faithfulness) that the romanticists gave importance to. Romanticism coincides with the Age of Revolution – the period of vast political, social, and economic upheavals that included the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789). Inspired by the energy of the revolutionary events, Romantic writers consciously set out to transform not only the theory and practice of their art but the very way in which we perceive the world.
Grounded on creative imagination and idealism, romanticists through their work describe the world not as it is but how it could be. For the Romantics, ‘art does not reflect the world outside, it creates a world within.’ Consequently, Romantic poetry is often lyric poetry, and we can assume that the speaker in each poem is either the poet himself or someone who represents him. Romanticism rejects the status quo of the world and sees the emphasis on rules and order to be personally, politically, and artistically limiting. Romantic art is an art of defiance that emphasises boldness, energy, eccentricity, and experimentation.

Romanticism, is thus, ‘apolitical’. It is not a war or a piece of technology or a political event. It is a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual. However, when ‘nationalism’ became the product of imagination for the romantics as in Romantic Nationalism, Romanticism became a force of political movement. Joep Leerssen (20) defined Romantic Nationalism as ‘the celebration of the nation (defined by its language, history, and cultural character) as an inspiring ideal for artistic expression; and the instrumentalisation of that expression in ways of raising the political consciousness.’ Artistic expression in the form of folklore acts as a reservoir of the narratives on nationalism. In fact, folklore has been used as a tool to imaginatively recreate the glory of one’s history, one’s cultural roots, and such a recreation in the world of bondage often ignited the spirit of nationalism, for example, German nationalism, Finnish nationalism, and Indian nationalism.

The term ‘Romantic Nationalism’ indicates that ‘nationalism’ could be one key aspect in the realm of Romanticism, and it resulted from the interaction between ‘cultural production and political thought.’ In fact, the connection between Romanticism and Nationalism was usually seen as a situational one; the two arose simultaneously, concurrently, in one specific part of the world at one historical moment, and therefore unavoidably shared common features, interactions, and crosscurrents (Leerssen 10). The ‘Romantic-nationalist’ nexuses became an analytical lens or conceptual framework for research most predominantly in the 1980s and 1990s.

Culture is the ‘implication of Romanticism’ since culture is ‘understood as a historically situated and historically variable praxis of communicated ideas,’ and as nationalism is woven on such communicated ideas, consequently, romanticism formed an easy connection with the concept of nationalism (Leerssen 11). Language is another important implication of Romanticism. In Romantic Nationalism, culture and language occupy a prior position to the reasoning of ‘constitutional rights, religion, or historical inheritance.’ Romanticism believed in emotions, intuitions, and mystical feelings over reasoning and science and tries to evoke feelings of a common past and shared heritage, thus, opening the way for the formation of nationalist spirit particularly for those groups of people (for example like India) who were under the bondage of a foreign rule. We shall discuss this in the following sections.

Check Your Progress 3

Notes:
1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;
4.3.1 German Nationalism

The earliest origins of German nationalism began with the birth of romantic nationalism during the Napoleonic Wars when Pan-Germanism started to rise. German nationalism, which is an ideological notion that promotes the unity of Germans and German-speakers into one unified nation-state, became an important political force in response to the invasion of German territories by France under Napoleon. From the late 19th century, many Pan-Germanist thinkers, since 1891 organized in the Pan-German League, had openly adopted ethnocentric and racist ideologies, and ultimately gave rise to the foreign policy *Heim ins Reich* (meaning “back home to the Reich”) pursued by Nazi Germany under Austrian-born Adolf Hitler from 1938, one of the primary factors leading to the outbreak of World War II.

Prof. Strobel wrote, “If we want to walk safely into the future, then we will have to walk upon the firm soil of our folklore” (cited in Kamenetsky 223). But such interpretation of folklore could easily lead to chauvinism and ethnocentrism. For instance, German nationalism, the movement that considered the non-Aryan race as inferior to the superior and pure-breed Aryan German race, subsequently led to the horrific Jewish holocaust. German nationalism aimed at purging Germany of the cultural influence of the ‘outsiders’ or other races like the West and most particularly the Jews. By ‘race’ the Nazi Germany referred more to the set ‘cultural criterion’ rather than ‘biological criterion’ (Kamenetsky 226).

Folklore connects strongly to the cultural roots of a particular race or community. Through the collection of various folklores, German nationalism tried to construct the life of peasantry as the cultural source of the German Aryan race. Kamenetsky (228) commented that “since the Romantic movement, folklore had always paid much attention to the peasant as a natural source of information concerning traditional heritage.” On various occasions, Hitler, by consciously cultivating the peasant heritage of the Nordic-Germanic ancestors, called the peasant the ‘cornerstone of the whole nation’ who had preserved the primary culture, namely, loyal racial folklore at its very best (Kamenetsky 228, 234). By relating the spirit of nationalism to that of the Nordic-Germanic peasant life world, Nazi Germany expressed the slogan ‘blood and soil’ indicating Nazi Germany’s ideal of a ‘racially’ defined national body (‘blood’) united with a settlement area (‘soil’). According to Christa Kamenetsky, folklore was used as a ‘political tool in Nazi Germany’ when the National Socialist Party Weltanschauung decided to lopsidedly focus, on it to serve ‘ideological usefulness to the party. They took to the folklore with Nordic-Germanic symbols. Germany under Adolf Hitler persistently tried to revive the German folklore in his quest for cultural unity and to make ‘Volk’ a permanent concept. In short, Germany under the Nazi tried to establish confidence in its native culture by linking the concept of peasant folklore with that of national unity.
Johann Gottfried von Herder’s argument that “oral poetry was the loftiest expression of a people’s character” prompted the idolisation of the German nation. “The voice of the people thus became the voice of God, and God was to be conceived of as German” (Cochina 181-182, cited in Korom 90). Such superior and ulterior feeling of the German is captured in their concept of ‘Volk’ and Volksch movement. In fact, Romanticism in Germany in the late 18th century to early 19th century contributed to the rise of German nationalism and helped its people to feel proud of their country (Leerssen 11). The German word ‘Volk’ is considered the first cousin of the English ‘folk’. The German concept of ‘Volk’ (people, nation, or race) has been an underlying idea in German history since the early 19th century. Inherent in the name was a feeling of superiority of German culture and the idea of a universal mission for the German people. The Volk-related words created “a sense of belonging... an ‘us’ and a ‘not us’.” This is also called the Volksch movement. A German ethno-nationalist movement became active from the late 19th century through to the Nazi era, with remnants in the Federal Republic of Germany. Despite the previous lower-class connotation associated with the word Volk, the Volksch movement saw the term with a noble overtone suggesting a German ascendancy over other peoples.

Erected on the idea of ‘blood and soil’, inspired by the one-body-metaphor, and by the idea of naturally grown communities in unity, it was characterized by organicism, racialism, populism, agrarianism, romantic nationalism and – because of a growing exclusive and ethnic connotation, by anti-Semitism from the 1900s onward. During the period of the Third Reich, Adolf Hitler and the Nazis believed in and enforced a definition of the German Volk which excluded Jews, the Romani people, Jehovah’s Witnesses, homosexuals, and other ‘foreign elements’ living in Germany. Their policies led to these ‘undesirables’ being rounded up and murdered in large numbers, in what became known as the Holocaust. The purity of the bio-mystical and primordial nation theorized by the Volksch thinkers began to be seen as having been corrupted by foreign elements, the Jews and therefore justified the Holocaust. The movement combined sentimental patriotic interest in German folklore, local history and a ‘back-to-the-land’ anti-urban populism. The concept of ‘Volk’ has a much more complicated and deeper meaning than its English equivalent concept of ‘folk’. It strongly emphasises the superiority and purity of the Aryan race or German race. After the defeat of Hitler’s Germany in World War II, this concept of the extreme right has not been able to secure populist support. And the concept perhaps also has undergone a transformation with the change of time and situation. For instance, today, German Chancellor Angela Merkel is of the opinion that the term ‘volk’ includes all the inhabitants of Germany and is not confined only to the so-called pure-breed Germans.

4.3.2 Finnish Nationalism

Another nationalism movement wherein folklore has a tremendous impact is that of Finnish nationalism. “Probably in no country has the marriage of folklore studies and nationalism produced such dramatic results as in Finland,” observes Wilson (1976). The most particular influence was that of an epic based on folk poetry - Kalevala, the work of Elias Lonrot that was published in 1835. Maranda (63) informed that ‘the Kalevala was widely used in nationalism propaganda, including chauvinistic propaganda, that is, the furtherance of the ‘Greater Finland’
concept.’ *Kalevala* became the visible symbol that assures Finns that they have an identity distinct from that of the foreign colonisers – first the Swedes and then the Russians. This realisation could not have been made possible by folklore, and Finland today would not have existed as a sovereign country.

Finland was ruled by Sweden from 1249 to 1809 and the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1917. The Finnish nationalism, which originated as an ‘academic movement’ for it incorporated the study of linguistics, folklore, and history that helped to establish a sense of national identity for the Finnish people, could be traced back to the 18th century. In fact, the text of Finnish nationalism is vividly captured in the phrase: ‘We are no longer Swedes; we cannot become Russians; we must be Finns’ (Finland–The Rise of Finnish Nationalism, countrysidestudies.us). In Finnish nationalism, “the intervention of a Finnish mythology not only incorporated a notion of national identity and distinction but provided an instrument for exorcising ‘foreign’ elements, notably those of Swedish and Russian culture” (Salomaa 69).

By reviving Finnish folklore and mythology, the Finns realised their cultural and linguistic distinctness from the Swedish and the Russians and such consciousness led to the movement for political nationalism. In short, Finnish nationalism may be said to have developed from cultural and linguistic origins to a will to full political self-determination which they attained in 1917-1918 (Saari 1944).

### Check Your Progress 4

**Notes:** 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;

2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;

**Question 4:** Write a short note on German or Finnish Nationalism.

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### 4.4 FOLKLORE AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

Folklore greatly helps the listeners and the readers to identify themselves with the lore on a patriotic level as folklore is a representation of a folk culture. Folk culture “is a steady and permanent force,” “it is never rigid or absolutely at rest” and since it is “a product of the native soil, it is an expression of the cultural community spirit”. That is why folklore can have a huge impact on the minds of those who identify themselves as native dwellers (Kamenetsky 223). Folklore can be used and interpreted in politically neutral terms, however, when folklore is discoursed in the realm of romantic nationalism, it can no longer remain apolitical or non-political. It develops a political meaning and thus becomes a representation of a political symbol. In other words, ‘folklore is the merger of social and political spheres’ (Kamenetsky 224).
It has been maintained that in India various efforts, most notably those of Rabindranath Tagore, to revive Indian folklore were made to awaken and embolden the ideas of nationalism. Collection of local folklore was considered not just to recover an ancient national spirit, but also to carry the modern nationalist message to large audiences who were mostly illiterate (abhiptea.abhimana.com). In fact, the efforts to revive Indian folklore by Tagore, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and even Mahatma Gandhi greatly influenced the destiny of modern Indian literature, setting the stage that Indian romanticism is fraught with mysticism. This is unlike English romanticism, which wants to break puritanic shackles, seeking joy in Hellenism (Ibid).

History, myths, folk culture, etc. were revisited to revive the pride among the people in the greatness of India’s culture or way of life and history that was ended with the foreign invasion of British colonialism in the 19th century (1858 - 1947). One must mention that although the period of colonialism in India is normally identified with the British Raj, an earlier wave of colonialism began with the establishment of the Mughal Empire. This was accomplished by a Central Asian Turk named Zahir ud-Din Muhammad Babar (d. 1530), whose reign only lasted four years, but whose empire lasted for more than three centuries until the British Raj defeated it in 1857, the First War Independence (Korom 92). Natesa Sastri, the person responsible for collecting a massive four-volume Tamil folk tale and titling it ‘The Folklore of Southern India’ stated that ‘the folklore was national literature; it was the most trustworthy manifestations of people’s real thoughts and characteristics.’ Similarly, Johann Gottfried von Herder also argued that oral poetry was the loftiest expression of a people’s character (cited in Korom 90).

The folklore of India would mean the folklore of the nation of India and the Indian subcontinent. However, we need to keep in mind that India is an ethnically and religiously diverse country. Therefore, the source of the origination of its folklore is also equally diverse. Although India is a Hindu majority country (more than 80% of its population being Hindu), there is no single, unified, and all-pervading concept of identity present in it, except the broad Indian nation concept that binds and unites all the diverseness. In other words, there are various heterogeneous traditions, numerous regional cultures, and different religions co-existing in India. It hence is a perfect melting pot of various religions, cultures, and religions. Accordingly, being determined, regional movements in the pre-independence period were smoothly blended with the idea of a national movement against the British oppressor.

In the pre-independence era, materials on regional or sectarian movements, such movements led by Rani Lakshmi Bai, Bhagat Singh, Birsa Munda, etc., were preserved in the form of folklore, ballad, etc. and became a powerful tool in shaping the larger picture of Indian nationalism. All these movements were time and area-specific but later they became important narratives in raising and colouring the political consciousness of the people for a national movement. Such materials are considered ‘as expressions of authentic simplicity’ and managed to powerfully inform the minds of Indians on the evil rule of the Britishers. Folklore directly connects with the cultural roots of the people and is readily accepted by the people as holding ‘authentic truth’ despite the lore not making sense when thought of scientifically, as they sound too ethereal and unnatural. Folklore is popularised as the ‘true spirit’ of the nation. Going further, it became essential in the project of nation-building. Folklore has populist support and honour and has
impact the nationalism movement greatly. In this sense, folklore becomes the
indispensable foundation of the nationalism movement and nation-building. It
‘tapped the soul of the nation’ and awakened and spread the nationalist fervour.

Indian nationalism is predominantly studied in its connection with the national
or freedom movement, and this is investigated in its political and socio-economic
context (Voigt 242). It was a unified movement for socio-political and economic
freedom from British control. This was initially impacted by various sectarian or
regional revolts against the same enemy before a unified pan-India national
movement was mobilized under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Such a unified
larger movement was possible because a new spirit, ‘a consciousness of belonging
to and being part of a nation’ was born. In fact, Mahatma Gandhi in his efforts to
awaken the socio-political consciousness of the masses constantly spoke to them
in the language they could understand and uses symbols and ideas that could be
related without difficulty by the masses, for example, Ram Rajya, Swaraj,
Swadeshi, Harijan, etc. With the consciousness of belonging to a nation, former
expressions of patriotism and loyalty to a particular state or area or region blended
with the spirit of the ‘new national consciousness’. The blending was successful
because of the cross-regional spread of folklore of the martyred heroes, for
example, the folklore of Rani Lakshmi Bai, Bhagat Singh and Birsa Munda.
These shall be discussed shortly.

Check Your Progress 5

Notes: 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at
   the end of the unit;

Question 5: There was a spirit of Romanticism in Indian Nationalism. Explain.

Check Your Progress 6

Notes: 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at
   the end of the unit;

Question 6: Explain how folklore raised the consciousness of Indian
nationalism.
4.4.1 Romanticism in Indian Nationalism

There was a romantic phase in Indian nationalism. According to Voigt (26), Romanticism, in the Indian context, after the middle of the 19th century was a growing reaction against ‘rationalism’ for ‘a greater interest in the history of the country, of a new evaluation of traditions and customs, and a new appreciation of the mother tongue’. This reaction against ‘rationalism’ was also a reaction against foreign influence and taking pride in the past. It also generated a love of the native language and literature, although language did not become the main characteristic of nationality in India (Voigt 247-48). Indian nationalism was imbued with a strong ‘emotional element’ and more ‘romantic’ being built on ‘cultural and religious unity.’ True in the Indian context, romantic nationalism tried to build up a common identity around the greatness of a single culture, invoking a mass consciousness and patriotism around the promoted culture. Such creations of romantic nationalism are linked to an ancestral or traditional homeland and the way of life prevalent or assumed to be prevalent in such homeland.

Folklore, poems, ballads, songs, literature, awakened the political consciousness of the people and instilled a strong sense of nationalism. Voigt (252) further maintained that in the romantic stage, the nation is comprehended by way of description; what distinguishes India from other nations; not necessarily what is common or should be common to all nations is stressed. In short, romantic nationalism in India is strongly based on socio-cultural criteria such as cultural homogeneity, shared history, and distinct language.

4.4.2 Influence of Rani Lakshmi Bai

Rani Lakshmi Bai is vividly captured in the minds of Indians as the Queen of Jhansi who went to battle against the British colonialist with her infant tied on her back, wielding swords in both her hands. She was the Queen of the Maratha princely state of Jhansi in North India. She was one of the bravest women in India and her story lives on in Indian folklore, ballads, literature, movies, etc. She was named Manikarnika Tambe by her parents Moropant Tambe and Bhagirathi Sapre but fondly remembered as ‘Jhansi wali Rani’ or ‘Rani of Jhansi’. In 1842, Manikarnika got married to Maharaja of Jhansi and after her marriage; she came to be known as Rani Lakshmi Bai. According to the Maharashtrian tradition, women were being given a new name after marriage and Lakshmi Bai was the name given to Manikarnika in honour of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi. She and her husband together adopted the king’s cousin son after their own son died. Lakshmi Bai’s marriage was short-lived as the Maharaja died of an illness in the year 1853. Lord Dalhousie, then Governor-General, lost no time to take advantage of the Maharaja’s death and applied the Doctrine of Lapse. According to this doctrine, a king’s adopted child was not entitled to the throne. Hence, the British snatched away her Jhansi and her son’s right to the throne and took away all the state jewels and offered the Rani a measly pension of Rs. 60,000. She was forced to leave the fort and move to another fort which is now called Rani Mahal in Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh.

The chaos in the kingdom of Jhansi, simultaneously, was caught up with 1857, the first war for India’s freedom. Many factors brought on the first war of Independence, the most famous being the introduction of cartridges to the army that were allegedly greased with both beef and pork fats. The soldiers took this
as an attempt by the British to defile their religion and thus decided to join hands despite their differences. The soldiers were then joined by the rulers whose royal estates had been annexed by the British. Reportedly, the Rani of Jhansi initially was not willing to join the war. However, she changed her mind and decided to go to war with all the resources she had, in 1858 as Sir Hugh Rose demanded the complete surrender of Jhansi.

She accordingly became one of the leading figures of the war. In this war, the British proved too strong to be defeated and Rani of Jhansi lost, unfortunately. She first fled to Kalpi and then to Gwalior during the battle. She was eventually martyred, and her troops whisked her body away to keep her last wish of not having her body captured by the Britishers. She was cremated as per her wish at Phool Bagh in Gwalior. The narratives of the Rani of Jhansi still ring in patriotism even in the 21st century Indians. Various statues of Lakshmi Bai are seen in many places of India like Gwalior, Thiruvanthapuram, Jhansi, Andaman, and the Nicobar Islands, etc. This indicates that the influence of her story that awakens patriotism is not limited just to North India.

A women’s unit of the Indian National Army was also named the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. In 1957, two postage stamps were issued to commemorate the centenary of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Many novels, poetry, and films also narrated the uncomplicated valorisation of Rani Lakshmi Bai as an individual who was solely devoted to the cause of Indian independence. Furthermore, the Indian Coast Guard ship ICGS Lakshmi Bai has been named after her.

All these accounts are living proof that the tales of what the Rani of Jhansi did for the independence of Jhansi and in general India lived on. Her fights resonate even outside of Jhansi. Today, several patriotic songs and poems have been written about the Rani. The most famous of them all is the Hindi poem entitled ‘Jhansi ki Rani’ written by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan. For Marathi people, there is an equally well-known ballad about the brave queen penned at the spot near Gwalior where she died in battle, by B. R. Tambe, who was a poet laureate of Maharashtra and from her clan. Today, cutting across regional identities and the simultaneous differences, Lakshmi Bai is a symbol of bravery, patriotism, respect for the woman, perseverance, generosity, and fierce resistance to British rule. “She was the queen of a small state, but the empress of a limitless empire of glory.”

In the rebellion of 1857, she assembled 14,000 rebels/troops and organized an army for the defence of the city of Jhansi. Of this, reportedly only 60 survived. Often tagged as India’s ‘Joan of Arc’ (Michael White in 1901 wrote the novel ‘Lachmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi: The Jeanne D’Arc of India’, depicting the Rani in a romanticized way), the Queen became an icon of the Indian independence movement. Her story became a beacon for the upcoming generations of freedom fighters and her legacy lives on today, immortalized in several Indian songs and folklore, poetry, school textbooks, TV serials, etc., continuing to inspire generations.

Check Your Progress 7

Notes: 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;
Question 7: How did the narratives on the life of Rani Laxmi Bai create the feeling of nationalism?

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4.4.3 Influence of Birsa Munda

Popularly remembered as the ‘True Native Folk Revolutionist’, Birsa Munda was a tribal folk hero and a freedom fighter hailing from the Munda tribe of the Chhotanagpur Plateau area who by the age of 25 was already considered God by his people. In the 19th century, Birsa Munda, by the age of 25, had already managed to forge a cultural and religious unity among the tribals in Bihar and Jharkhand to act as the basis to resist and fight against British colonialism. Back then he was popularly known as ‘Dharti Abba’ or ‘the Earth Father’ who stressed the need of the tribals to take pride in their own culture and religion; to study their religion and not forget their cultural roots. He influenced his people to realise the importance of owning their land and asserting their rights upon them. He started a movement called ‘Ulgulan’, or ‘The Great Tumult’ through which he rallied the tribals to fight against the forceful land grabbing carried out by the British government which would turn the tribals into bonded labourers and force upon them abject poverty (India Today, June 9, 2016).

Munda strongly believed that forests and the forest produce belonged to the natives of the soil, particularly the Adivasis. And through the ‘Ulgulan’ movement, he sought to assert the rights of the Adivasis as the real owners of the soil, and the expulsion of Zamindars and the British. His movement that managed to bring other tribes like the Oraon and Kharias on one platform with the Mundas, was not just against the British, and to some extent the Zamindars, but also the ignorance in his community. He sought to rid the Munda community of tribal superstition, animal sacrifice and alcoholism. He also started the faith ‘Birsait’, and it turned into a challenge to British conversion activities (Indian Express). The struggle led by Munda impacted hugely the enactment of the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act passed in 1908. The Act that was passed eighty years after his death restricted the passing on of land from the tribal people to non-tribals.

Today, Birsa Munda is fondly remembered as ‘The founder of Jharkhand’ whose folklore is still celebrated all over the nation and most particularly in the tribal regions of Bihar, Jharkhand and even parts of Karnataka and Odisha. He is the only tribal leader whose portrait hangs in the Central Hall of Parliament. Various Hindi movies – Ulgulan – Ek Kranti (2004) and Gandhi Se Pehle Gandhi (2008) – were based on his life. Ramon Magsaysay Award Winner and activist Mahasweta Devi’s historical novel, Aranyer Adhikar (Right to Forest, 1977), is based on Munda’s life and his rebellion against the British Raj in the late 19th century (Outlook India Profile).
4.4.4 Influence of Bhagat Singh

Shaheed Bhagat Singh was an Indian socialist revolutionary whose acts of resistance against the British and execution at the mere age of 24 made him a folk hero of the Indian Independence movement. Nikhil Rampal wrote about him as ‘the freedom fighter everyone loves.’ Inspired by the Young Italy movement of Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, he founded the Indian Socialist Organisation, Naujawan Bharat Sabha in March 1926 and became its General Secretary. He also joined the Hindustan Republican Association. Singh was a young man with a utopian vision of free India, whose sense of nationalism was very different from that associated with Lala Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi, and other stalwarts of the freedom movement, stated Bhaskar (The Indian Express, March 23, 2016).

Many aspects of Bhagat Singh’s life are relevant in the prevailing socio-political turbulence, his rejection of communal identity and personal commitment to atheism, and above all, the commitment to revolution and rationality (Ibid). Jawaharlal Nehru wrote, “Bhagat Singh did not become popular because of his act of terrorism but because he seemed to vindicate, for the moment, the honour of Lala Lajpat Rai, and through him of the nation. He became a symbol; the act was forgotten, the symbol remained, and within a few months each town and village of Punjab, and to a lesser extent in the rest of northern India, resounded with his name.”

He is one of the most revered figures in India who is celebrated today by all sides of the political spectrum. The youth of India still draw a tremendous amount of inspiration from Singh. In fact, he was voted the ‘Greatest Indian’ in a poll by the Indian magazine India Today in 2008, ahead of even Subhash Chandra Bose and Mahatma Gandhi. C. Udal Bhaskar referred to Singh as the original ‘shaheed’, or martyr.

Check Your Progress 9

Notes: 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
       2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;
Question 9: Write a short note on Bhagat Singh.

In India, regional identity has existed in concurrence with the national identity all along. It has been contended that ‘India’s history and culture have always oscillated between an ideal of pan-Indianness and that of regional self-assertion’ (Ray 1968, cited in Karna 86). The idea of collective identity encompassed in the term ‘India’ is a modern phenomenon. Before this, various socio-cultural and linguistic communities with a specific or virtual geographical area had firm local and regional identities already established. Many of such identities became more refined and defined with the millennia of foreign invasion and dominance. In fact, the pan-Indian identity became popular only when the British colonialists managed to bring under its suzerainty 565 princely states and various provinces. The point is, on the eve of India’s independence from the grip of the British rules, there was no common cultural heritage that could act as the basis of India’s nation.

With the independence of India, going forth, all the distinctive states or regions or provinces were brought together under a single civil administration, by virtue of such unprecedented unison, all the diverse communities relegated their local or regional identities for a larger ‘Indian identity’. After this, the concept of ‘Indian nation’ was popularized among the masses, particularly non-literate masses, or rural people through the language which they could understand, folklore and folk performances, the medium which the masses could easily understand and associate with. However, after the goal of identifying the diverse communities to the pan-India identity was accomplished with the successful transition of power to India from the British India government, the assertion of regional identity started gaining ground.

Up till India’s independence, the people willingly and patriotically assigned lesser importance to their local or regional identity and fought for national freedom from the grip of the British colonialists, the common enemy of all Indians irrespective of region. R. Hudson (2009) stated that regions may develop a ‘structured coherence’, generating a sense of regional identity and interest shared by a range of social groups and forces, expressed via a particular ‘structure of feeling’.

In forming Indian regional identities, ‘symbols’ like folklore, language, religion, ethnicity, etc. shared by a collective acted as an important tool to establish a specific regional identity. Though the formation of regional identities in India created regionalism, it must be pointed out that regionalism should not always
be considered a challenge to the integration of the Indian nation-state. The history of India has shown that there is a unique strength in the philosophy ‘unity in diversity’ and India has managed to progress with this philosophy in practice.

Regionalism is the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose by people within a specific geographical region, united by its unique language, culture, language, etc. It is an ideology and political movement that seeks to advance the causes of regions. In a positive sense, regionalism encourages people to develop a sense of brotherhood and oneness which seeks to protect the interests of a particular region and promotes the welfare and development of the state and its people.

Check Your Progress 10

Notes: 1) Your answers should be 50 words long;
2) You may check the answers with the possible answers given at the end of the unit;

Question 10: How did the regional identities form in India?

In the Indian context, generally, the term ‘regionalism’ has been used largely in the negative sense. We must keep in mind that the root of regionalism is in India’s manifold diversity of languages, cultures, ethnic groups, communities, religions and so on. These were encouraged by the regional concentration of those identity markers. Some selected studies out of the many formations of regional identities are as follows:

4.5.1 Southern India Region

Although language did not become the main characteristic of nationality in India; it became one in the assertion of regional identity. For instance, after India’s independence, many states have been created on a linguistic basis and it started in the southern region. Karna (84) holds forth that India is a nation sharply divided along linguistic lines wherein several linguistic regions have begun to compete to impair the sense of national identity. The idea of linguistic regions or states rested primarily on the premise that these linguistic groups are ‘sub-nations’ (Indian Institute of Public Administration 1968b:443, cited in Karna 85). Indeed, Indian nationalism has been deeply wedded to the question of regional languages and this is indicated by the formation of linguistic states right after independence. The formation of linguistic states in India is based on the logic that language in India ‘stood for and represented the culture, tradition, race, history, individuality and finally, a sub-nation’, and that each linguistic group must have a territory of its own and that its territory was inviolate and could not be shared by any other linguistic group,’ stated the Linguistic Provinces Commission (IIPA 1968b, cited in Karna 86).
To understand the Southern regional identity, Telugu nationalism would be considered. It is considered the first leading example of cultural nationalism in independent India that culminated in the formation of Andhra State in 1953. The formation of the Andhra state opened the floodgates of regional nationalist aspirations in India to such a level that the leadership of India had to accept linguistic-cultural homogeneity as the basis of restructuring the map of the Indian Union (Nanda 33).

4.5.2 North-East India Region

To the outsiders, the articulation of northeast regional identity is not exactly based on language or culture but based on economic discrimination. However, within the region, there definitely exists the movement for various types of nationalism like political nationalism and cultural nationalism, etc. Indeed, within the garb of the common economic discrimination, North Easterners maintained a commitment to their respective state or community. For instance, the Naga people are engaged in the ‘national’ struggle of their own and their nationalism is not articulated based on a distinct language but based on a common Naga identity and a Naga ‘homeland’ (Nanda 36).

4.6 LET US SUM UP

Romanticism placed importance on emotion against reason and it helped to create nationalism by creating a sense of a shared collective heritage, and a common cultural past. As discussed above, it is a cultural movement that sought to develop a particular form of nationalist sentiment. For a country under the bondage of foreign rule, very often romantic nationalism – love for one’s folk culture, folk religion, folk language, etc. – paved the way to political nationalism – “the desire for national advancement and independence”. This is evidenced by some discussions on romantic nationalism in this chapter – German nationalism, Finnish nationalism, and Indian nationalism. In these countries, celebrating the concept of nation through folklore had led to the rise of political awakening. Folklore is well received with pride by its population and therefore it easily creates political awareness among the people; knocking some powerful sense of patriotism in that it can even forge unity cutting across various regions and can even lead to security of a country. In this sense, folklore becomes the indispensable foundation of the nationalism movement and nation-building. Folklore in the Indian nationalism struggle was like a double-edged sword in that the consciousness of a pan-India identity was expressed through folklore and it acted as a means by which this consciousness was nourished. Since the British were the common enemy of India at the national or all-India level, therefore, any local or regional movement in rebellion against it came to resonate a national awakening. For example, the rebellion movements launched by Rani Lakshmi Bai, Birsa Munda and Bhagat Singh had subsequently awakened and emboldened the spirit of nationalism at an all-Indian level.

There was a romantic phase in Indian nationalism that is strongly based on cultural and religious unity. ‘Nationalism was not a matter of the mind; it was a matter of the soul, not of thinking, but of feeling,’ stated Voigt (247). That is why Romanticism as a concept based on human emotions rather than reason can easily be blended with nationalism. A biased reading of Indian culture leads to the
assertion for various regional, local, or sectarian demands. In the principle of ‘unity in diversity’, the regional identities in the country have adjusted to the reality of an Indian state (Karna 94). Folklore has been used as the tool to propagate the popular concept of some specific communities creating a love for the diverse communities of India that has survived so far because of the application, respect, and honour of the principle of ‘unity in diversity’ of which ‘tolerance’ is the wellspring.

4.7 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING


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**4.8 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS**

1. Nation and nationalism are two different concepts but with undeniable relationships between them. Many tend to build the interrelationships between the two concepts predominantly from a political perspective even though various other perspectives like cultural, linguistic, religious and economic, all are an intertwining part of the discourse. The term nation which stems from the Latin verb *nasce*, meaning, ‘to be born’, refers to a relatively large group of genetically unrelated people with high solidarity (Hechter 10-11). “The past traditions of a nation have been articulated in terms of history, culture, language, folklore, territory or religion to demonstrate its antiquity and continuity,” states Karna (75). Nations, therefore, always give a distinct identity to a group of people from certain other groups.

2. Regional identity comprises a narrower and smaller concept in the face of the larger and broader national or international identity. In other words, when a regional identity is discussed *vis-a-vis* a nation-state or a country, then its concept is narrower and smaller than a national identity, however, it has a strong and distinctive flavour.

3. Romanticism, is thus, ‘apolitical’, it is not a war or a piece of technology or a political event. It is a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual. However, when ‘nationalism’ became the product of imagination for the romantics as in Romantic Nationalism, Romanticism became a force of political movement.

4. The earliest origins of German nationalism began with the birth of romantic nationalism during the Napoleonic Wars when Pan-Germanism started to rise. German nationalism, which is an ideological notion that promotes the unity of Germans and German-speakers into one unified nation-state, became an important political force in response to the invasion of German territories by France under Napoleon. From the late 19th century, many Pan-Germanist
thinkers, since 1891 organized in the Pan-German League, had openly adopted ethnocentric and racist ideologies, and ultimately gave rise to the foreign policy *Heim ins Reich* (meaning “back home to the Reich”) pursued by Nazi Germany under Austrian-born Adolf Hitler from 1938, one of the primary factors leading to the outbreak of World War II.

5. There was a romantic phase in Indian nationalism. According to Voigt (26), Romanticism in the Indian context after the middle of the 19th century was a growing reaction against ‘rationalism’ for ‘a greater interest in the history of the country, of a new evaluation of traditions and customs, and a new appreciation of the mother tongue’. This reaction against ‘rationalism’ was also a reaction against foreign influence and taking pride in the past. It also generated a love of the native language and literature, although language did not become the main characteristic of nationality in India (Voigt 247-48). Indian nationalism was imbued with a strong ‘emotional element’ and more ‘romantic’ being built on ‘cultural and religious unity.’ True in the Indian context, romantic nationalism tried to build up a common identity around the greatness of a single culture, invoking a mass consciousness and patriotism around the promoted culture. Such creations of romantic nationalism are linked to an ancestral or traditional homeland and the way of life prevalent or assumed to be prevalent in such homeland.

6. Folklore greatly helps the listeners and the readers to identify themselves with the lore on a patriotic level as folklore is a representation of a folk culture. Folk culture “is a steady and permanent force,” “it is never rigid or absolutely at rest” and since it is “a product of the native soil, it is an expression of the cultural community spirit”. That is why folklore can have a huge impact on the minds of those who identify themselves as native dwellers (Kamenetsky 223). Folklore can be used and interpreted in politically neutral terms, however, when folklore is discoursed in the realm of romantic nationalism, it can no longer remain apolitical or non-political. It develops a political meaning and thus becomes a representation of a political symbol. In other words, ‘folklore is the merger of social and political spheres’ (Kamenetsky 224). It has been maintained that in India various efforts, most notably that of Rabindranath Tagore, to revive Indian folklore were made to awaken and embolden the ideas of nationalism. Collection of local folklore was considered not just to recover an ancient national spirit, but also to carry the modern nationalist message to large audiences who were mostly illiterate. In fact, the efforts to revive Indian folklore by Tagore, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and even Mahatma Gandhi greatly influenced the destiny of modern Indian literature, setting the stage that Indian romanticism is fraught with mysticism.

7. All narrative accounts are living proof that the tales of what the Rani of Jhansi did for the independence of Jhansi and in general India lived on. Her fights resonate even outside of Jhansi. Today, several patriotic songs and poems have been written about the Rani. The most famous of them all is the Hindi poem entitled ‘Jhansi ki Rani’ written by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan. For Marathi people, there is an equally well-known ballad about the brave queen penned at the spot near Gwalior where she died in battle, by B. R.
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8. Popularly remembered as the ‘True Native Folk Revolutionist’, Birsa Munda was a tribal folk hero and a freedom fighter hailing from the Munda tribe of the Chhotanagpur Plateau area who by the age of 25 was already considered God by his people. In the 19th century, Birsa Munda, by the age of 25, had already managed to forge a cultural and religious unity among the tribals in Bihar and Jharkhand to act as the basis to resist and fight against British colonialism. Back then he was popularly known as ‘Dharti Abba’ or ‘the Earth Father’ who stressed the need of the tribals to take pride in their own culture and religion; to study their own religion and not forget their cultural roots. He influenced his people to realise the importance of owning their land and asserting their rights upon them. He started a movement called ‘Ulgulan’, or ‘The Great Tumult’ through which he rallied the tribals to fight against the forceful land grabbing carried out by the British government which would turn the tribals into bonded labourers and force upon them abject poverty.

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