UNIT 2: STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND NATIONALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to acquaint you with the idea of nation and nationalism in South Asia and the struggle for independence from colonial rule launched in different countries of the region. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the rise of national consciousness in different countries of South Asia;
- Describe the issues involved in the freedom movement; and
- Identify the different strategies for liberation adopted in the region.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

South Asia has a continuous history of seven thousand years. It has a composite culture developed through a historical process wherein the emphasis has been on unity in diversity.

South Asia has been the victim of repeated foreign aggression. The richness of the region perhaps attracted the aggressors from far and wide. In the successive waves of invasions since the ancient times, the Aryans, the Greeks, the Shakas, the Huns, the Turko-Afghans, the Mughals and others came to the region. In the modern period, the Europeans viz. Portuguese, Dutch, French and the British came to South Asia, though it was the British who finally established their hold in the region. The British invasion was qualitatively different from the earlier ones. Whereas the earlier invaders came, settled down here and got completely assimilated with the indigenous
people, the British integrated the region into their empire and ruled it from London. The region was linked with the industrially advanced international market in order to exploit its natural resources. South Asian economy and society became subordinated to the imperialist political economy and social development. The region was transformed into a market for the British machine-made goods, a source of raw material and foodstuffs, and an important field of capital investment. The entire structure of economic relations between Europe and the South Asia involving trade, finance, and technology continuously developed the colonial dependence and underdevelopment of the latter. This new politico-economic system of subordination, called colonialism, resulted in the emergence of Europe as a leading capitalist region while the colonies were reduced to backward and underdeveloped regions of the world. In course of time, the economic and political domination led to numerous conflicts and contradictions which ultimately resulted in the growth of nationalism and movements for independence from colonial rule.

### 2.2 NATIONALISM IN SOUTH ASIA

Broadly, there were three patterns of colonial governance in the region. Whereas the British Indian Empire embraced the area which covered the present independent republics of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, Sri Lanka was governed as a 'Crown colony'. The smaller nations of Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives were not British colonies, but were 'protectorates', that is, in return for surrendering their autonomy over their external relations, their independent existence was protected by the British. Given that nationalism in South Asia emerged as a reaction against colonial exploitation and subjugation, the regions which were under the direct control of the colonial administration witnessed strong anti-colonial and nationalist movements.

The rise and growth of nationalism in South Asia was a reaction against colonial exploitation and subjugation. The new form of nationalism that became the basis of the new states in South Asia derived much of its ideology and political theory from the West but was adapted to particular circumstances and experiences. The basis of this new nationalism was an instinctive xenophobic hatred for imperialism and symbols of imperialism. It was a simple hatred against those who had occupied their land by force, exploited their riches by force, crushed their government, and enslaved their people. Nationalism also became a creative force which aimed at building a nation based upon the principles of liberty, independence, economic justice, and nationality. It not only united the people, but also inspired them to contribute their share in the national reconstruction. The lead in this regard was given by India which produced one of the biggest mass movements in the world. The movement not only succeeded in freeing it from colonial yoke, but also left a historically developed, well thought out programme for free India. The example of India inspired other colonies such as Sri Lanka and gave rise to political consciousness in countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives.
2.3 FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN SOUTH ASIA

2.3.1 India

The rise and growth of nationalism in India was the product of the interaction of numerous objective and subjective forces which emerged in the historical process during the British colonial rule. While colonialism resulted in the economic exploitation of India and the destruction of its agriculture and handicrafts, it also led to the political and administrative unification of India. This factor combined with the introduction of modern transport, new education, press etc. resulted in the raise of national consciousness. Since nationalism in India developed under the aegis of British imperialism (which remained foreign till its expulsion), a lot of hurdles were created in its development and consolidation.

The Indian national movement passed through various phases and with each passing phase, its social base broadened, its objective became clearer and its forms of expression varied. The first phase of the national movement began in 1885 with the formation of the Indian National Congress (INC) and lasted roughly up to 1905. During this phase, the leadership of the movement was in the hands of liberal leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, G.K. Gokhale, M.G.Ranade, S.N. Banerjee, Ferozeshah Mehta etc. At this stage, the objective of the movement was not freedom but political, administrative and economic reforms. At political level, the demand was to reform the central and local legislative councils so as to secure more powers for the Indian representatives (which resulted in the passing of Indian Councils Act, 1892). At the administrative level, the most important demand was to Indian is the higher grades of administrative services through a simultaneous ICS examination in England and India. At economic level, the demand was for the industrialisation of the country and promotion of Indian industries. The methods adopted to achieve these aims were clearly determined by liberal ideology. Constitutional agitation, effective argument and fervent appeal to the democratic consciousness and traditions of the British were the accepted methods of struggle. Gradualism and constitutionalism were the key concepts. They believed that the main purpose was to educate the masses, heighten national consciousness and create a consensus on political issues.

During this phase, the national movement had a narrow base, the masses could not be attracted to it. Its influence was limited to urban educated class. The Muslims by and large preferred to accept the leadership of Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan. In 1906, when the Muslim League was established, the Muslim community was affected by its communal character and tended to stay away from the national movement.

Meanwhile, discontent against the British increased because of the highhanded measures of Lord Curzon who not only passed a number of laws such as the Indian Universities Act and the Calcutta Corporation Act curtailing the powers of the Indians but also partitioned Bengal, ostensibly for administrative convenience but politically to create a division between the Hindu dominant West Bengal and Muslim dominated East Bengal. Large number of nationalists became disillusioned with the ideology
and methods of the moderate leaders. With the rise of leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal, the national movement entered a new phase, the Extremist or militant phase. The extremist leaders practiced a new political philosophy and methods of struggle. Their programmes included boycott of foreign goods, breaking of all relations with the British Government, founding of national institutions for education, and propagation of swadeshi. The boycott movement launched by the nationalists was aggressively anti-British. It included not only the boycott of British goods but also renunciation of the government titles and posts and boycott of councils and schools. By providing stimulus to cottage industries, it also became an instrument for the economic regeneration of the country. The extremists emphasized that there was an inherent clash between the Indian and the British interests and that the national movement was a direct result of this clash. The political propaganda of the militant nationalists instilled national pride, self-respect and self-confidence in the people. It also broadened the base of the national movement associating with it the lower middle class, students and youth. But the movement resurrected Hindu ideas and invoked Hindu symbols which weaned its secular character. This is perhaps why the movement could not prevent a large mass of the Muslims from accepting the communal ideology of the Muslim League.

A new phase in the Indian national movement began with the entry of Mahatma Gandhi. During the World War I, the political activities were at a low ebb. But after the war, there was great unrest among the people because of the fall in agricultural prices, increasing poverty of the middle classes, debt due to war, price rise, profiteering etc. The British government rewarded the Indian people with Government of India Act, 1919 that increased the participation of Indian people in the administration. But the Act did not come to the expectation of the Indian leaders. In these circumstances, the British severely restricted the civil liberties in India by enacting the Rowlatt Acts in 1919.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who had returned from South Africa in 1914, initiated the struggle against the British rule by organising a series of non-violent acts of resistance against the Rowlatt Acts of 1919. The following year, Gandhi reorganised the Congress, transforming it from an annual gathering of national leaders to a mass movement, with membership fees and requirements set to allow even the poorest of the Indian to join. In August 1920 he launched a full scale non-cooperation movement on the twin issues of: i) rectifying the wrongs of the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, and the ii) khilafat movement. The non-cooperation movement through non-violence and Satyagrah revolutionized the nature of the national movement. It was transformed into a mass movement. It had three-tier programme: boycott of the national assembly, courts and foreign cloth. Motilal Nehru, C.R. Das, Patel, Rajendra Prasad and many others left the courts, students left schools and teachers resigned from schools and colleges. The movement was not limited to boycott, it offered a positive programmes like opening of national educational institutions and the establishment of cottage and handloom industries. However, Gandhi ended the non-cooperation movement in 1922 when the movement turned violent at Chaura Chauri.
A special feature of the non-cooperation movement was Hindu-Muslim unity. But after the withdrawal of the movement, there were Hindu-Muslim riots throughout India. Both the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha took belligerent stands.

The national movement got a new lease of life in 1928 when the British government announced the appointment of Simon Commission to study the next steps of democratic reforms in India. The Congress boycotted the commission on the ground that Indians were not represented in the Commission. It began to formulate a parallel constitution having the consent of the major communities. A committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Motilal Nehru to prepare a consensus report. The Committee prepared an All Parties Constitution based on self-governing dominion. The report also recognised titles in private and personal property. The socialists criticized the scheme for abandoning the goal of independence. But most importantly, the report did not enjoy the support of Jinnah and the Muslim League which felt that the Muslim interests have not been protected. Since the All Party Convention did not accede to the demands of the League, Jinnah parted company with the Congress.

Meanwhile, the younger leadership of INC represented by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose was not satisfied with the dominion status and called for complete independence. On 31 December, 1929, Congress, under the presidentship of Motilal Nehru passed a resolution for Purna Swaraj, that is, complete independence. The Civil Disobedience Movement began on 6 April 1930 by breaking the salt law. Gandhi prepared a comprehensive plan for this movement. He wanted every village to fetch or manufacture contraband salt, women to picket liquor shops, opium dens and shops of foreign cloth dealers; the young and old to spin khadi and burn foreign cloth, the Hindus to eschew untouchability, students to leave government school and government servants to resign their jobs. The government responded by issuing a number of ordinances, banning the Congress and all its branches, closing down newspapers and printing presses and arresting as many as 90,000 people. Negotiations that followed resulted in the Gandhi-Irwin Pact by which all the political prisoners were released and Gandhi agreed to be sole representative of the Congress at the Round Table Conference in London. Gandhi placed the views of the Congress on the federal scheme for India, problems of minorities, the army etc. He opposed the communal division. But due to differences among the various Indian groups at the conference, viz. Congress, Hindu Mahasabha, Muslim League, Sikhs, native princes etc., no agreement could be reached and Gandhi came back from the conference empty handed. In the meantime, the British government announced the Communal Award that not only gave separate electorate to Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, but also to the depressed classes. Gandhi who was in jail started a fast unto death. This resulted in the signing of Poona Pact that reserved seats for the depressed classes instead of separate electorate.

The constitutional reforms finally took shape in the form of the Government of India Act of 1935. The Act provided for the establishment of autonomous legislative bodies in the provinces of British India, the creation of a federal form of government incorporating the provinces and princely states, and the protection of Muslim minorities. The 1935 Act opened a new chapter in the
Indian constitutional development. Although the Act did not come up to the expectation of the political parties; all the parties decided to fight elections for the provincial assemblies in 1937. The Congress won absolute majority in five provinces out of seven and a near majority in Bombay. On the other hand, the Muslim League could not form a government in any province and its idea of coalition government in U.P. and Bombay with Congress was rejected by the later. This further alienated Jinnah. He began to think in tennis of Muslims not as a minority but as a separate nationality. In March 1940, Jinnah propounded the 'two nation' theory and the Muslim League passed its famous resolution demanding a separate Muslim state constituting the geographically contiguous regions on the western and eastern zones of India.

When the World War II broke out, the British declared war on India's behalf without consulting Indian leaders. The Congress provincial ministries resigned in protest. In 1942, the Congress demanded that British should immediately quit India and passed the famous 'Quit India' resolution. But before the movement for this could be launched, all the leaders, including Gandhi were arrested and the movement became leaderless and took a violent turn. There were strikes, agitations and demonstrations in all parts of India. Police stations, post offices and railway stations were attacked, communication wires were cut and railway lines destroyed. This phase showed that, if need be, the Indian people could take to violence to end British imperialism.

Meanwhile, while the Congress leaders were in jail, Jinnah got a free hand to strengthen the support base of the Muslim League. The League soon became the chief spokesman of the Muslims. After 1943, the only question that remained was how the power could be transferred to India. After the War ended in April 1945, there were fresh elections in Britain and the new Labour government had to face a number of national and international problems. War had weakened the economy of Britain. America and Russia which had emerged as super powers were in favour of freeing the colonies. Moreover, Britain found it difficult to maintain a colony like India which had witnessed mass movements and the revolt of the Indian National Army. In March 1946, the British government sent a Cabinet Mission to India. After long and detailed discussions with different political parties and organizations, the Mission rejected the Muslim League's demand to partition the country and made its proposals for an Indian federation and the setting up of a constituent assembly. The proposals were accepted both by the Congress and the League though reluctantly. In September 1946, an interim government was formed under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Muslim League also joined the government but decided not to participate in the making of a new constitution. On 20 February 1947, the British Prime Minister announced his government's decision to quit India before June 1948. Lord Mountbatten was to be sent to India to make arrangements for the transfer of power. In the meantime, the bickerings within the interim government were threatening the breakdown of the administration. The hostility between the two communities had acquired frightening proportions. Jinnah was adamant that the Muslims would not agree short of a sovereign state. As such partition of India and establishment
of Pakistan was inevitable. Mountbatten's formula was that the country would be divided but also Punjab and Bengal so that the limited Pakistan that emerged would meet both the Congress and the League positions to some extent. The formula for partition and independence was accepted by all the major political parties in India and was given final shape by the British Parliament through Indian Independence Act 1947. The act provided for the creation of two independent dominions India and Pakistan, provided for the partition of Bengal and Punjab and gave the constituent assemblies of both the countries the power to frame their own constitutions. Thus, on 15 August 1947 India attained independence.

2.3.2 Pakistan

The origin and the struggle for Pakistan lie in the communal politics of pre-independent India. One of the major developments during the national movement was the rise and growth of communalism. According to Bipin Chandra, communalism consists of three stages: i) the communal ideology starts when persons or groups believe that people of the same religion have common socio-economic interests, ii) the second stage is reached when a person or a group believes that different religion based communities have their own special interests, though these interests can be reconciled and accommodated, iii) the stage is reached when the religious differences converted into secular differences and are seen as incompatible with each other. It is at this stage that the idea of separate nation gets established. In the context of India till 1930, communal ideology of reconciliation and accommodation was prevalent but during 1940s, it reached its extremist form of a separate nation resulting in the partition of the country.

Communalism started acquiring something like an all India dimension in the late 19th century. The reform movements launched by Muslim elite at this stage aimed at spreading English education and was basically intended to prepare the Muslims for the job market. They hardly tried to enlighten the community with modern ideas. The sectarian approach of the reform movement created the ground for the emergence and development of Muslim communal parties and politics. The British responded positively to these developments and did everything to encourage separatist tendencies among the Muslims. The British colonial officials gave their blessings to the Muslim League which was formed as an all India party in December 1906.

When the partition of Bengal was annulled in 1912, the Muslim League was dismayed and disappointed with the British and began advocating self government for India within the British Empire. In 1916, it signed the Lucknow Pact with the INC, whereby the Congress approved the institution of separate electorates and safeguards for Muslims in government service. It used communal politics and ideology to mobilise the people and keep them away from the growing national movement.

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peak during the non-cooperation movement. The pact ended in 1922 with the calling off of the non-cooperation movement. The following years saw the rise of Hindu-Muslim communalism expressing itself in number of riots in different parts of the country.

Prospects of Hindu Muslim unity became bright when all parties boycotted the Simon Commission and decided to formulate an all-parties constitution. Since the demands put forth by the leader of the Muslim League, Mohammad Ali Jinnah were not met at the Conference, he virtually parted ways with the Congress. Consequently, all the Muslim groups joined hands and put forth a single document known as Jinnah's 14 Point Programme which became the basis for any further discussion for the future of India. During the Round Table Conferences, no decision could be reached because of the uncompromising attitude of the League. To add fuel to the fire, the British government through the Communal Award accepted almost all that was demanded in Jinnah's 14 Point programme.

From 1930 onwards, a section of the Muslim intelligentsia began to think in terms of a separate independent Muslim state in India. Mohammad Iqbal presiding over 1930 session of the Muslim League said 'I would like to see the Punjab, north-western Frontier provinces, Sindbad Baluchistan amalgamated into a single state'. At the Round Table Conference, a group of Muslim students in England led by Rahmat Ali proposed a Muslim state PAKISTAN (taking the first letter of four provinces and the end of the last province). Despite the yearnings for a separate Muslim state, the League pursued a policy of cooperation with the Congress and favoured a loose federal relationship among provinces within a united India. However, after the 1937 elections, in which the League had fared badly winning only 108 seats out of 485 seats reserved for Muslims, the League evolved into a strong anti-Congress party. As it went about consolidating support among the Muslims, the idea of living together as a single nation began to be replaced by the politics of hatred, fear, and separation. The interests of Hindus and March 1940, the League propounded the two-nation theory and passed a resolution Struggle for Independence and demanding the creation of 'independent states' for Muslims in the north-western and eastern parts of India.

Though the resolution was not taken seriously at that time but as months passed the was a rapid change. By 1943 it became an article of faith and a matter of life and death for the Muslims. The ambitious politicians, legislators, and administrators saw ample opportunities for power in the new state. The professional class of lawyers, doctors, teachers, entrepreneurs and industrialists saw much scope for their activities. To the Muslims peasants of Bengal and Punjab, Pakistan was presented as the end of exploitation by Hindu zamidars and bania.

The League fought the 1945-46 election on the ground that 'a vote for the League and Pakistan was a vote for Islam'. Winning 440 of the 495 seats reserved for Muslims, the League established itself as the dominant party among the Muslims. Jinnah declared that there could be no compromise on the issue of Pakistan. The Cabinet Mission plan rejected the formation of Pakistan and called for the establishment of an interim government. Initially,
the League did not join the government, but later joined it, declaring at the same time that it will not participate in the drafting of the constitution. In August, Jinnah had called for 'Direction Action' for the creation of Pakistan. The following months witnessed the worst ever communal riots between the two communities starting from Bengal, Bihar and United Provinces reaching Delhi and culminating in Punjab. Mountbatten who had been sent to India for the transfer of power felt that immediate action was necessary and this action could only be political. The discussions held between Mountbatten and the Indian National Congress on the one hand and between Mountbatten and Jinnah on the other created an outline of the scheme for the partition of India. This was embodied in an Indian Independence Act 1947 which defined the territories of the two dominions adjustable and fixation of the final boundaries after the Award of the Boundary Commission, partition of Bengal and Punjab and secession of Sylhet from Assam. Thus the communal divide ultimately led to the political divide and the creation of Pakistan.

2.3.3 Bangladesh

Bangladesh was part of Pakistan which was created on the demand that the Muslims are a nation and therefore must have a separate homeland and a state of their own. After Pakistan's creation, however, Bengalis came to develop an increasing sense of distinctiveness which prevented the development of a single national community. It was this estrangement that culminated in the secessionist movement as a result of which Bangladesh ceased to be its constituent part.

The first significant event that was a landmark in the development of Bengali nationalism in Pakistan was the decision of the ruling government of Pakistan to introduce Urdu as the national language of Pakistan in disregard of Bengali wishes. Bengalis saw it as an attempt at cultural intrusion. Different strata of population came out to protest this decision. Police action to disperse demonstrating students leading to the death of some individuals intensified Bengali hostility towards West Pakistan. The language movement sparked the first nationalistic sentiment that got reinforced by the economic and political treatment meted to the Bengal is by the dominant western Pakistan government. This demand later got turned into provincial autonomy. Legally, the Bengal is were citizens of Pakistan but economically the relationship between West Pakistan and East Pakistan was an exploitatrv one. East Pakistan's foreign exchange earnings were diverted to the West to develop its economy while the East was left lagging behind. There was some industrialisation, but its benefits were reaped by West Pakistan, because the ownei - "P-re mostly from West Pakistan. Politically, East Pakistan had a subordinate position in the state structure of Pakistan. With West Pakistan becoming the seat of central government, the Islam League did not allow the emergence of Bengali.

An. Instead, it sought to manage East Pakistan affairs through a combination of non-Bengali Nawabs and Muslim traders of erstwhile Bengal. The position became worse because both in the bureaucracy and in the armed forces the eastern wing of Pakistan had no significant participation. As a result, the Bengali leadership was given much less than its due in top decision making structure. The overwhelming domination of West Pakistan...
in government, bureaucracy and armed forces allowed them to manipulate and dominate East Pakistan.

The most significant impact of the language movement was on the 1954 general elections held under limited franchise. The Awami Muslim League that had emerged under the leadership of Bhashani in 1949 and other Bengali parties came together to form a United Front. They demanded, among others, autonomy for East Pakistan and adoption of Bengali as one of the state languages. They decisively defeated the Muslim League in East Pakistan. However, the Muslim League dismissed the United Front government within six months and imposed military rule in the name of Governor’s rule. With the establishment of military dictatorship under Gen Ayub Khan in 1959, the first phase of the struggle of people of East Pakistan ended.

The military dictatorship of Ayub Khan was really aimed at preventing the middle classes or the vernacular elite from coming to power. Politicians with a mass base were disqualified and the domination of the armed forces over the military-bureaucratic complex backed by the industrial and trading bourgeoisie was ensured. The rapid polarization that followed reflected the cumulative impact of the growing political, economic and cultural differences between the two wings. This found expression in the Six-Point Programme announced by the leader of the Awami League, Mujibur Rahman, in 1966. He demanded that the government be federal and parliamentary in nature, its members to be elected by universal adult suffrage with legislative representation on the basis of population; that the federal government have principal responsibility for foreign affairs and defence only; that each wing have its own currency and separate fiscal accounts; that taxation be done at the provincial level; that each federal unit having control over its own earning of foreign exchange; and that each unit could raise its own militia or paramilitary forces. This was virtually a demand for a confederation. The struggle for linguistic nationalism, autonomy, a balanced economic growth and democracy had now merged.

The third phase of the struggle was the elections of 1970, the first general elections conducted since independence. The Awami League not only swept the provincial assembly polls but also succeeded in securing a majority in the national assembly because of the larger population of the eastern wing. In such circumstances the promised constituent assembly would have inevitably legitimised Mujib's six-point programme. Hence the convening of the national assembly was postponed by the ruling military elite and an alliance was forged with the opposition i.e. Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan. Mujib launched a mass civil disobedience movement hoping to negotiate with Yahya Khan from the position of authority but the Pakistani ruling class used the negotiations to buy time to prepare for the military assault calculated to intimidate the Bengalis in submission.

When the military assault on Bengali nationalists began on 25th March, the civil disobedience and the non-cooperation movement turned into armed struggle. The brutal military action accompanied by torture, rape and murder of intellectuals destroyed the last vestiges of Pakistani nationhood in the people of Bangladesh. The heavy civilian causalities led to an unprecedented
migration of Begali people to India. What should rightfully have been an inte-
al affair of Pakistan, thus became a major problem of India. India provided
sanctuary and training facilities to the freedom fighters. Besides, it mounted
a massive diplomatic offensive to bring to the notice of the world the
genocide in Bangladesh and its liberation struggle. Finally, Pakistan spelt its
own doom by declaring war on India on 3rd December. The armed struggle
ended on 16th December 1971 when the Pakistani army surrendered to the
joint command of the Bangladesh Liberation Army and the Indian army in
Dacca. Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign independent nation.

2.3.4 Sri Lanka

The political history of Ceylon, which later came to be known as Sri Lanka,
can be traced back to the 3rd century B.C. During the early years, the
island was divided into smaller principalities. Dutthagamini, a Sinhala
prince from Rohana, attempted to unify the island but complete unification
remained a distant hope for a long time. Beginning from the 3rd century
BC, Ceylon experienced periodical invasions from South India and in the
11th century the north-western region became a province of the Chola
kingdom. In the 12th century, the Sinhala king Parakramabahu I unified
the whole country. But after his death, the country plunged into disorder
and chaos which attracted the invaders from South India. It was these
invasions which culminated in the formation of a Tamil kingdom in the
Jaffna peninsula in the north of the island. When the Portuguese arrived in
late 16th century, Ceylon was divided into three independent kingdoms: two
Sinhalese, one based at Kotte with control over the south and east of the
island, and the other at Kandy ruling the central highlands; and one Tamil
kingdom controlling north and east. This gave them ample opportunities
to intervene in Ceylonese politics and raise their settlements in the coastal
region. In the mid 17th century, they were replaced by Dutch traders who
were supported by the Sinhalese. The Dutch ruled the coastal Ceylon for
over hundred years when much of the interior remained independent under
the Kandyan kings. The British displaced the Dutch in 1796. In 1802, they
abolished the separate Tamil state and made it into a 'crown colony'. In
1815, taking advantage of internal dissensions within the Kandyan kingdom,
the British succeeded in overthrowing the Nayakkar dynasty. It guaranteed
Kandyans their privileges and rights and the preservation of customary
laws, institutions, and religion. Though Kandy was administered separate-
ly, the trend towards reducing the status of its aristocrats and bhikkhus was
unmistakable; this led to a popular rebellion against British control in 1818.
This Great Rebellion was crushed and the Kandya province was integrated
with the rest of the country.

Becoming the effective rulers of the whole of Ceylon, British colonialists
quickly began a reform process. They relieved the native officials of
judicial authority, paid salaries in cash, and relaxed the traditional system of
compulsory labour called the rajakariya system. Restrictions on European
ownership of land were also lifted. Agriculture was encouraged. The
Colebrooke Cameron Commission systematised these early changes through
the Charter of Justice of 1833. The British adopted a unitary administrative
and judicial system for the whole island. They reduced the autocratic
powers of the governor and setup Executive and Legislative Councils to
share powers in the task of government. English was made the language of the government and the medium of instruction in schools.

In the economic sphere, the British abolished all state monopolies, did away with rajakariya system, and promoted free trade. They encouraged plantation agriculture by selling Crown land cheaply. As a result, production of cinnamon, pepper, sugarcane, cotton and coffee flourished. The labour on the coffee plantations was predominantly immigrant Indians. In the later half of the 19th century, commercial crops like tea, rubber, and coconut plantation became the catalyst of modernization of the Ceylonese economy.

It should however be noted that the capitalist enterprise was restricted to urban areas and areas under plantation. The rest of the country continued under subsistence agriculture, using traditional methods, though the isolation of the villages was broken somewhat by roads and railways.

National consciousness and the origin of modern nationalism in Ceylon can be traced back to the religious revivalism, which was a reaction to the Christian missionary enterprise. In the later half of the 19th century, revivallist movements in Buddhism and Hinduism sought to modernise their institutions and to defend themselves against the Christianity by establishing schools to impart Western education unmixed with Christianity. This consciousness gradually spread to the political arena. A number of regional and communal associations that had come up in the educationally advanced parts of the country began to demand political reforms within the colonial constitution. They asked for Ceylonese participation in the executive branch, a wider territorial representation in legislature, and the adoption of elective principle in place of nomination. The colonial administration ignored these demands as they were not coordinated or vociferous. The constitutional reforms of 1910 retained the old structure with an appointed executive and a legislative branch with an appointed majority. The elective principle was recognised to a limited extent by establishing 'educated Ceylonese' electorate to elect one member to the Legislative Council. Other Ceylonese members were to be nominated on communal basis.

Forces of nationalism gathered momentum during the World War I. The growth of national political consciousness was aided by the political repression that followed the civil disturbances in 1915. When the British arrested prominent Sinhalese leaders during what was then a minor communal riot, leaders of all communities came to oppose the move. It became the first political agitation on the island. Feeling the need for a common platform to voice a nationalistic viewpoint, the Sinhalese and Tamil organisations came together to form the Ceylon National Congress in 1919. The Congress demanded control of the budget, elected majority in the legislature and practical control of the executive branch.

The British government, already under pressure because of the decline in the growth of world trade after World War I, a rise in prices of imported goods including foodstuffs and heightened working class activity, promulgated a new constitution in 1920. It provided for an elected majority in the legislature, an increase in the number of territorially elected members, and the election of communal representatives. Thus, a representative government came into
being in Ceylon. The executive, however, remained under the governor and the official Executive Council.

Following these reforms, there was the breakdown of the Sinhalese and Tamil harmony of interests. While the Sinhalese leaders wanted to do away with communal representation and make territorial representation universal, minorities desired to retain communal representation to secure power for their communities. In this context, the Tamils began to regard themselves as minority community. With the increase in dissension and mutual suspicion between the Sinhalese and Tamils, the minorities broke away from the Congress to form their own organisations.

A new constitution framed in 1931 gave Ceylonese leaders opportunities to exercise political power and to gain governmental experience with a view to achieving eventual self-government. It provided for a State Council which combined legislative and executive functions. In addition to being a legislative council with an overwhelming majority of territorially elected members, the State Council was divided into seven committees (each headed by a minister or chairman) for executive work. Perhaps the most significant feature of this constitution was that by granting universal franchise, it brought all Ceylonese into the political process.

The growing national movement in India and the introduction of adult franchise further augmented the national movement in Sri Lanka. Movements for social welfare increased. Working class movement got impetus with the foundation of the Marxist political party. The introduction of universal suffrage also led to the recrudescence of religious nationalism i.e. nationalism intertwined with Buddhist resurgence and its associated cultural heritage. This was given expression by S.W.R.D. Bhandaranaike through his Sinhala Maha Sabha. The universal suffrage also compelled the constitutionalist leadership during the second State Council (1936-47) to become more positive towards social and economic facets of the resurgence of nationalism, particularly in the fields of health, education and food subsidies.

In response to the radical agitations, the British government appointed Soulbury Commission in 1944 to examine the constitutional problems. The Commission internal self-government, with defence and external affairs under the British control. Ceylonese radical elements, however, pressed for complete independence. Meanwhile India's independence became a reality. In the context of the new situation, Great Britain was forced to transfer complete power on 4th February 1948 to the representatives of people elected as per the provisions of the new constitution in the general elections held in 1947.

The transfer of power in Sri Lanka was a smooth and peaceful, a reflection of the moderate tone of the dominant strand in the country's national movement. There was no bitterness or division at the time of independence as in the case of India. It made the whole process rather bland. Independence was granted from above and lacked the active spirit of nationalism.
**Check Your Progress I**

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What was the political philosophy and methods adopted by the Extremist leaders in India?

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2) What were the main grievances of the Bengal is in East Pakistan?

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3) When and on what issue did the Sinhalese and Tamils develop differences?

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2.3.5 Nepal

For much of its early history, Nepal was divided into a number of independent principalities. In the mid 18th century, Prithvinaraian Shah, the chief of the Gurkha principality unified the whole of Nepal and founded the Shah dynasty. The present borders of Nepal came into being after the war with the British rulers in 1814. Nepal lost considerable amount of territory to British India, but it gained British recognition of its sovereignty. Even though Nepal was never occupied by the British, it was rarely in a position to assert its complete independence. When India became independent, Nepal too declared its independent status.

Since minor heirs succeeded Prithavinaraian, the prime ministers began to wield immense political power. This resulted in intrigues, conspiracies, killings and counter killings and instability. This situation continued until the mid-19th century, when Jang Bahadur Rana eliminated all rival political factions and reduced the king to a titular head. The Shah ruler, who was secluded in the palace grounds, was asked to issue a sansad (royal decree) granting Jung Bahadur absolute authority in civil and military administration and foreign relations. This sansad which also bestowed the office of prime minister upon the Ranas in perpetuity provided the legal basis for the rule of the Rana family in the country.

Since the power of the Rana prime ministers was ultimately illegitimate, resting on the abdication of responsibilities by the king and his virtual incarceration, the Rana rule became autocratic and reactionary in order to prevent any challenge to their authority. In the process, they succeeded in isolating Nepal from many of the changes happening throughout the world and even in nearby India.

Nepal, however, did not remain in complete isolation. The reform movements in India and the rise of national movement under Indian National Congress
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deeply influenced the middle classes. The ina regime's suppression of the modernist aspirations of the educated classes gave birth to an anti-Rana movement. Nepali exiles and those who had come to India for education set up associations which aimed at building a popular movement in Nepal and replace the Rana system by a democratic order. In the 1930s, some of these organisations, such as the Nepali Nagrik Adhika Samithi, Prachanda Ghorka, Praja Parishad, etc. formed by Nepali people living in exile in India, demanded immediate political reforms in Nepal and an end to the rule of the Ranas. This precipitated internal disturbances in Nepal. These developments in Nepal coincided with preparations for British withdrawal from the subcontinent. It may be noted that the Rana system had been supported and sustained by the British rulers in India who saw in Ranas, a useful and subservient ally. The atmosphere within the country was also not in favour of the Ranas. The king was aligned with the anti-Rana forces for obvious reasons. Moreover; the Ranas themselves had internal contradictions owing to various categories of expanding and amorphous lineage in the family. Accordingly, may of the Ranas in the lower status of the family hierarchy and lineage (born of less pure marriage) had either directly joined the anti-Rana movement or were indirectly opposing the ruling coterie as they had no stakes in the degenerated system. There were also sharp differences of ideology and tactics among the Rana rulers on how to deal with the forces of change. In such circumstances, the then Rana prime minister, Padma Shamsher thought of accommodation with the leaders of the democratic movement. This change in attitude paved a way for political reforms and constitutional developments in Nepal.

In 1948, Rana Mohan Shamsher promulgated the first written constitution of Nepal. It provided fundamental rights to the people and revived the traditional panchayat system without disturbing the traditional powers of the Ranas. When the Rana prime minister outlawed the Nepali National Congress and showed no interest in implementing the new constitution, anti-Rana forces came together to form the Nepal Democratic Congress in Calcutta in August 1948. This group advocated the overthrow of the Ranas by any means, including armed insurrection. It tried to ferment army coups in January 1949 and January 1950 but failed. When the Rana government arrested B.P. Koirala and other organizers in October 1948 and subjected regime opponents to harsh conditions and even torture in jail, its democratic opponents turned against it again.

The break for the nationalists came in 1950 when King Tribhuvan and his family sought asylum in India. Several anti-Rana organisations then joined together under the banner of the Nepali Congress, launched an armed struggle against the Rana regime. The Nepali Congress set up a provisional government at the border town of Birganj after its forces had captured much of the Terai from the Ranas. At this stage, India, which had just recognised the Rana regime in Nepal and concluded the Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1950, decided to intervene to find an amicable way out. India mediated with the three segments of the Nepali politics in the crisis situation, the Ranas, the popular leaders and the King to work out a settlement. India's approach was that Nepal should follow a middle path where in the traditional elite should be preserved at the same time some
progress should be made towards democracy. The agreement concluded in New Delhi in February 1951 envisaged a coalition government of the Ranas and the Nepali Congress as well as restoration of the status and power of the monarchy. An interim ministry headed by Mohan Shamsher with five Ranas and five Nepali Congress Party members was sworn in February 1951 after the King returned to Kathmandu. The King issued a full mohur revoking all the hereditary powers and privileges of the Rana family. Thus, the regime that had lasted for 104 collapsed in 104 days.

2.3.6 Bhutan

Bhutan was divided into several small principalities until 17th century. In the eastern Bhutan a ruling house was founded by the descendants of a Tibetan prince who had migrated in 9th century A.D. The western region was divided into several estates, controlled by different Buddhist monastic schools. The prince, Abbot-Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, arrived in Bhutan from Tibet as a refugee in 1616. With the help of existing monasteries belonging to his school of Buddhism, he launched a struggle to unify Bhutan. In this struggle, Shabdrung defeated the rival schools and also repulsed successive invasions from Tibet and united the country. But after his death, Bhutan was in turmoil once again. Out of this turmoil emerged Ugyen Wangchuk who restored order and peace in Bhutan and founded the present hereditary ruling house in 1907.

When the Bengal Presidency was established by Britain in the later half of the 18th century, its borders touched the Bhutanese territory. This resulted in periodic skirmishes between the British and the Bhutanese. It finally led to the full scale Anglo-Bhutanese war in 1864-65 which settled the border. Thereafter, the British influence in Bhutan gradually increased at the expense of China and Tibet. In 1910, despite Chinese protests, Ugyen Wangchuk signed a treaty with the British rulers of India in which he "agreed to be guided by the advice of the British government in regard to its external affairs". In return, the British government pledged not to interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan.

The following year the king attended the famous Delhi Durbar and he knew and accepted the fact that none but feudatory chiefs of India were to participate in the Durbar. The British, however, did not regard Bhutan as an Indian State and did not adopt policies normally applied to native princes, such as recognizing and regulating succession, intervening in case of threats to the state or gross misrule.

When India was on the verge of independence, the Bhutanese government was apprehensive that the new Indian government was likely to interfere in the internal affairs of Bhutan and as a counter balance wanted to have some relations with the British government in London. However, when the Bhutanese delegation went to New Delhi to negotiate a standoff treaty with the new Indian government, it was impressed by the sincerity of the new Indian regime. The Bhutanese government and the Political Officer in Sikkim signed the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949 at Darjeeling in August 1949. The Treaty clearly established Bhutan as a sovereign power. India undertook not to interfere in the internal administration of Bhutan while Bhutan agreed to be guided by the advice of India in its external relations.
case of dispute arising in applying the Treaty, constitution of an Arbitration Council with an Indian, a Bhutanese representative and the chairman to be nominated by Bhutan among the Federal High Court judges from India was also envisaged. These stipulations have worked to the satisfaction of both the contracting parties.

2.37 Maldives

The early history of the Maldives is obscure. The early settlers here were probably from southern India. Indo-European speakers followed them from Sri Lanka in the fourth and fifth centuries BC. In the 1st century AD, sailors from East Africa and Arab countries came to the islands. The Maldivian ethnic identity is therefore a blend of these cultures, reinforced by religion and language.

Originally Buddhists, Maldivian were converted to Sunni Islam in the mid-12th century. Since then the Maldives has been governed as an Islamic sultanate for most of its history. It came under the feudatory subjection of the king of Cannanore in coastal India. For the first time in its history, the Maldives came under direct control of foreign power, when the Portuguese occupied the northern islands in 1553. Within 15 years the Portuguese were driven out by the people led by warrior-patriot, Mohammad Bodu Takuru. The Sultan later concluded a treaty with Portuguese which restricted their independence and Maldives was forced to send a fixed annual tribute to the Portuguese in Ceylon.

When the Dutch and later the British established their hold on Ceylon, the Sultan of Maldives continued the practice of sending an annual tribute to the European Governors in Ceylon, a practice that continued till the first half of 20th century. The Europeans left alone the local government and internal affairs of the Maldives.

Knowing the strategic importance of the islands as well as to protect trade conducted by British subjects, in 1887, the Governor of Ceylon signed an agreement with the Sultan. By this agreement, Great Britain formally recognized Maldives as its protectorate. According to the terms of the agreement, the responsibility of recognizing and installing the sultan and the control of the country's defence and foreign relations were vested in Great Britain. In return, the islanders were left free to decided internal affairs.

Maldives continued to be ruled under a succession of sultans. The sultans were hereditary until 1932 when an attempt was made to make the sultanate elective, thereby limiting the absolute powers of sultans. Maldives remained a British crown protectorate until 1953 when the sultanate was suspended and the First Republic was declared under the presidency of Muhammad Amin Didi. The sultanate was however, restored the following year. Political developments in the Maldives since then have been largely influenced by the British military presence in the islands.

In 1956, the Britain obtained permission to re-establish its wartime airfield on Gan islands and a radio station on Hithadhu Island. Maldives granted the British a 100-year lease on Gan that required them to pay £2,000 a year. Before the agreement could be ratified, the new Prime Minister, Ibrahim Nasir, called for a review of the agreement in the interest of shortening the
lease and increasing the annual payment. But in 1959, Nasir was challenged by a local secessionist movement in the southern atolls that benefited economically from the British presence on Gan: He allowed Britain to continue to use both the Gan and the Hitaddu facilities for a thirty-year period, with the payment of £750,000 over the period of 1960 to 1965 for the purpose of Maldives' economic development.

On July 26, 1965, Maldives gained independence under an agreement signed with Britain. The British government retained the use of the Gan and Hitaddu facilities. In March 1968 the sultanate was abolished by a national referendum. Maldives became a republic in November 1968 under the presidency of Ibrahim Nasir.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

   ii) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1) What factors contributed to the demise of the Rana system in Nepal?

2) ................................................ is regarded as the founder of modern Bhutan.

3) Maldives attained independence on ....................................... .

2.4 LET US SUM UP

As is evident from above, nationalism and the struggle for independence in the South Asian region were the direct result of the colonialism and imperialism of the western nations. The lead in this direction was given by India that not only led the most powerful liberation movement spanning over a period of more than sixty years but also influenced directly and indirectly other countries of the region.

Although, the struggle for freedom was anti imperialistic, yet the proto national loyalties - religious, ethnic or otherwise- among the people proved an obstacle rather than a contribution to the national consciousness and national unity. This was readily mobilized by the imperial masters against the nationalists by encouraging communalism. The net result was the partition of India and the creation of Pakistan. Communalism the resultant partition of India and the creation of Paldstan were the outgrowth of the complexities of the national movement. Basically communalism was the disguised expression of the struggle between the vested interests belonging to different faiths that gave a communal form to that struggle. The communal question had no religious issue. It was a question of struggle between various sections of the professional classes belonging to different faiths.

The cultural and geographical separation between West Pakistan and East Pakistan, combined with differences in social, economic and political factors, set the stage for a second wave of nationalism that resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. It was a struggle for nationalism of a 'nation within a nation. The idea of two-nations theory i.e. Hindus and Muslims form
separate nationalities proved wrong.

In Sri Lanka, the freedom struggle evolved in a peaceful, gradual and constitutional manner. In striking contrasts to other parts of South Asia, Sri Lanka in 1948 was an oasis of stability, peace and order. The transfer of power was smooth and peaceful, a reflection of the moderate tone of the dominant strand in the country is nationalist movement, there was hardly any bitterness or division.

In the case of Nepal, the problem was internal i.e. a power struggle between the royal family and the reactionary and autocratic Rana system. The anti-Rana democratic movement began after the World War I, it intensified following the independence of Indian in 1947. The Nepali Congress launched a powerful movement against the Rana rule in 1950. India gave a tacit support to the movement that in the course of time turned into a violent armed struggle and paved the way for a constitutional monarchy in February 1951.

In Bhutan, the British interest was very much limited. Till independence of India, the relations between Bhutan and British Government remained cordial. At no stage Britain thought of interfering in the internal affairs of Bhutan except controlling its foreign relations. This tradition was continued by independent India by the 1949 treaty between India and Bhutan.

In the case of Maldives, no Western colonial power directly ruled the Maldives except the Portuguese who managed to gain control over it for a short period. Between 1887 and 1965 it remained a protectorate of Great Britain. In the internal matters and the conduct of domestic politics, the Maldives remained largely unhindered. And though at the constitutional level, certain changes were brought about they did not affect the pace or the pattern of social structures except in a formal sense.

2.5 SOME USEFUL BOOKS


Banerjee, Subrata (198_1) Bangladesh. New Delhi,


1.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1) The Extremist were aggressively anti-British and aimed at economic regeneration of the country. Their programmes included boycott of foreign goods, breaking of all relations with the British Government, founding of national institutions for education, and propagation of swadeshi. Their political philosophy instilled national pride, self
respect and self-confidence in the people. They also broadened the
basis of the national movement associating the lower middle class,
students and youth with it.

2) Nationalistic sentiment among Bengalis was aroused by the decision
of the Pakistani government to introduce Urdu as the official language.
The economic and political treatment meted to the Bengal is by the
dominant western Pakistan government also strengthened Bengali
identity. Economically the relationship between West Pakistan and
East Pakistan was an exploitative one. Politically, East Pakistan had
a subordinate position in the state structure of Pakistan. Both in the
political and administrative spheres, Bengalis felt left out.

3) Political differences between the Sinhalese and Tamils came to surface
in the 1920s. The constitutional reforms of 1920, subsequently modified
in 1924 provided for communal representation. The Sinhalese leaders
wanted to do away with communal representation and make territorial
representation universal. Tamils, who began to regard themselves as
minorities wanted to retain communal representation to secure power
for their communities.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Basically, since the power of the Rana prime ministers was illegitimate, Rana rule was autocratic and reactionary. The suppression
of modern democratic aspirations gave rise to anti-Rana movement.
In the 1940s, the Rana rulers lost the support of the British following
their withdrawal from India. Rana rule was further weakened when
some of Rana family members of lower rank joined forces with anti-
Rana movement. The final blow to the Rana rule came when the king
showed readiness to assume his sovereign responsibilities.

2) Ugyen Wangchuk
3) 26th July, 1965