

UNIT 10 INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT-1

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

No major development of modern India can be explained and understood without a reference to the Indian National Movement. The Indian National Movement represented the Indian people's urge to be free from the foreign yoke. After reading this Unit you will:

understand the upsurge of 1857 in all its dimensions,

be aware of the factors which contributed to the emergence of Indian Nationalism,

be able to explain the political objectives and the strategies of the early nationalist leadership,

understand the differences of approach between the moderates and militant nationalists,

understand the Swadeshi Movement and its implications for the Indian National Movement,

be able to identify the process of cultural renaissance, and
know about the various social reform movements during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this Unit we introduce you to the various aspects of Indian National Movement during its earlier phase. Resistance to British rule had always been there, but it was in 1857 that large sections of Indian people in various regions made a combined effort to overthrow the British. That is why it is often termed as the first war of independence. Due to certain weaknesses the uprising was crushed by the British but as far as the struggle was concerned there was no going back. This inspired a new kind of struggle. The intelligentsia, which earlier believed in the benevolence of British rule now came forward to expose its brutality. Political associations were formed and the Indian National Congress played a vital role in directing the freedom struggle. We discuss in this Unit the role of moderates and militant nationalists and the efforts made during the Swadeshi Movement to involve the masses into the freedom struggle.

This was also a period of cultural renaissance as far as Indian society was concerned. Many social and religious reformers took up the battle against the social and religious evils that existed in our society. This contributed immensely towards the making of a new India.

This Unit attempts to give you a glimpse of the issues that were undertaken by the Indian social reformers. The scope of this Unit is however confined to the period just before the emergence of Gandhi on the Indian political scene.

10.2 1857: THE FIRST WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

In 1857 occurred the Revolt known as India's First War of independence when millions of soldiers, artisans and peasants made a combined effort to overthrow foreign rule. The Revolt was, however, no sudden occurrence. It was the culmination of nearly a century-old discontent with British policies and imperialist exploitation. The British conquered India and colonized its economy and society through a prolonged process. This process led to continuous resistance by the people through a series of civil rebellions led by deposed rulers, impoverished zamindars and poligars (landed military magnates in South India) and ex-officials of the conquered Indian states. The mass base of these rebellions came from the ruined peasants and artisans and demobilized soldiers. Starting with the Sanyasi rebellion and Chuar uprising in Bengal and Bihar in the 1760s, there was hardly a year without armed opposition or a decade without a major armed rebellion in one part of the country or the other. From 1763 to 1856 there were more than 40 major rebellions apart from hundreds of minor ones. Though massive in their totality, these rebellions were, however, wholly local in character and effects and were isolated from each other.

The revolt of 1857 was, however, to involve millions in large parts of the country and to shake the British rule to its very roots.



1: Soldiers of 11th irregular cavalry being disarmed (1 August 1857)

10.2.1 Causes

The Revolts of 1857 started on 10 May when the Company's Indian soldiers (sepoys) at Meerut rebelled, killed their European officers, marched to Delhi, entered the Red Fort and proclaimed the aged and powerless Bahadur Shah 11 (who still bore the prestigious name of the Mughals) as the Emperor of India.

The Company's sepoy had many grievances against their employers, ranging from declining material and other service conditions to religious interference and racial arrogance. But basically they reflected the general discontent with British rule. They were after all a part of Indian society they were 'peasants in uniform'. The hopes, desires, despair and discontent of other sections of Indian society — they were reflected in them. The sepoy's rebellion was a product of the accumulated grievances of the Indian people. The most important underlying cause of the Revolt was the disruption of the traditional Indian economy and its subordination to British economy and the intense economic exploitation of the country. Above all, the colonial policy of intensifying land revenue demand led to a large number of peasants losing their land to revenue farmers, traders and moneylenders. Destruction of traditional handicrafts ruined and impoverished millions of artisans. The economic decline of peasantry and artisans was reflected in 12 major and numerous minor famines from 1770 to 1857.

Thousands of zamindars and poligars lost control over their land and its revenues. Hundred of chieftains lost their principalities. The interference by the East India Company was disliked by many Indian rulers. The traditional scholarly and priestly classes lost their patronage from the traditional rulers, chieftains, nobles and zamindars, and were impoverished.

A major cause of the Revolt was the very foreign character of British rule. The British remained perpetual foreigners in the land. The Indian people felt humiliated in having to obey the orders of 'foreign trespassers'.



2: People and Soldiers in the Battle at Bareilly (5 May 1858)

10.2.2 Extent and Intensity

The Revolt of 1857 swept Northern India like a hurricane. Nearly half of East India Company's Indian soldiers rebelled. Everywhere in Northern India, the soldiers' rebellion was followed by popular revolts of the civilian population. According to one estimate, of the total number of about 1,50,000 men who died fighting the English in Avadh, over 1,00,000 were civilians. The Revolt soon embraced a wide area engulfing Avadh, Rohilkhand, the Duab, the Bundelkhand, Central India, large parts of Bihar, and East Punjab. There were uprising in Rajasthan at Nasirabad, Nimach and Kota. In Kolhapur also the sepoys rose in arms. In many of the princely states of these regions, the rulers remained loyal to the British but the soldiers and people joined the rebels or refused to fight against them. W.H. Russel, who toured India in 1885 as the correspondent of the London Times, wrote:

"In no instance is a friendly glance directed to the white man's carriage
Oh! that language of the eye! Who can doubt? Who can misinterpret it? It is
by its alone that I have learnt our race is not even feared at times by many and
that by all it is disliked."



3: Times correspondent viewing the sacking of Kaiserbagh at Lucknow.

Great strength was imparted to the Revolt by Hindu-Muslim unity. Both at the level of sepoys and the people as well as at the level of leaders there was full cooperation between Hindus and Muslims. The Revolt also threw up some courageous and brilliant leaders Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Tanya Tope, Begum Hazrat Mahal of Avadh, Kunwar Singh, Khan Bahadur of Bareilly, Maulavi Ahmadullah of Faizabad, and Bakht Khan, the petty officer in the British army who rose to become a General of the rebel army, are some of the famous names of the Revolt. Above all, the ordinary sepoys and common people fought with exemplary courage and unselfish devotion.



4: Begam Hazarat Mahal

10.2.3 Defeat

In the end, British imperialism, at the height of its power the world over, succeeded in ruthlessly suppressing the Revolt. The reasons were many. Despite its wide reach, the Revolt could not embrace the entire country or all sections of Indian society. Bengal, South India and large parts of Punjab remained outside its reach since these areas had already exhausted themselves through prolonged rebellions and struggle against the British. Most rulers of Indian states and the big zamindars remained loyal to the foreign rulers. Thus, Scindhia of Gwalior, Holkar of Indore, the Nizam of Hyderabad, the Rajput rulers of Jodhpur and many other Rajputana states, the Nawab of Bhopal, the rulers of Patiala and Kashmir, the Ranas of Nepal, and many other rulers and chieftains gave active support to the British in suppressing the Revolt.

In general, merchants and moneylenders either supported the British or refused to help the rebels. The modern educated Indians also did not support the Revolt. The leaders of the Revolt fought with courage, but could neither coordinate their struggle nor evolve a unified high command. Instead, they indulged in constant petty quarrels. The rebels were short of modern weapons and often had to fight with primitive weapons such as swords and spikes. They were very poorly organised. The sepoys were brave but at times there was lack of discipline which affected their military efficiency.



5: Rani Jhansi in Battle field.

Above all the rebels lacked a modern understanding of British colonialism or the nature of the state and society which was to replace it. They were united by their hatred of the British rule and the desire to restore pre-British economic, political and social relations, but shared no conception of the political or socio-economic structure of free India. This was perhaps inevitable. Common all-India feeling and interests were yet to evolve. Perhaps if the Revolt had lasted a few years, a common modern understanding and national consciousness would have evolved in the course of the struggle, as it did later; but the rebels were given no such time- their revolt was crushed by the end of 1858.

This first great struggle of the Indian people to win freedom from British domination was not in vain. It left an indelible mark on the consciousness of the Indian people and served as a permanent source of inspiration to the later struggle for freedom.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Write in about 100 words the main causes behind the Revolt of 1857.

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong ? Mark (✓) or (X).

- i) The Revolt of 1857 was the first effort at a national level to overthrow British rule.

- ii) The revolt of 1857 was only a sepoy mutiny
 - iii) All the merchants and moneylenders supported the revolt of 1857.
 - iv) Hindu-Muslim unity gave added strength to the revolt of 1857.
- 3) i) Give the names of three Indians rulers who supported the British in 1857.
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- ii) Give the names of three Indian leaders who opposed the British in 1857.
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10.3 EARLY PHASE OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The defeat of the Revolt of 1857 made it clear that uprisings based on old outlooks and social forces could not defeat modern imperialism. For that, new social forces, new ideologies, a modern political movement based on an understanding of modern imperialism and capable of mobilizing the masses for nationwide political activity were needed. Such a movement was initiated during the second half of the 19th century by modern nationalist intelligentsia. The new movement had a much narrower social base, but was inspired by new political ideas, new intellectual perception of reality and new social, economic and political objectives. It also represented new forces and forms of struggle, new leading classes and new techniques of political organisation.

Many factors were responsible for the rise of this powerful movement. But the decisive factor was the gradual emergence of the contradiction between the interests of the Indian people as a whole and the interests of the British rule, which was leading to the increasing underdevelopment of the Indian economy and society. It was also hampering India's further economic, social, cultural, intellectual and political developments. Let us briefly have a look at the factors that contributed towards the emergence of organised nationalism.

10.3.1 Role of Intellectuals

Initially, this process was grasped only by the modern Indian intellectuals. Paradoxically, during this first half of the 19th century, they had adopted a very supportive approach towards colonial rule:

They had believed that the restructuring of Indian society could occur under British rule because Britain was the most advanced country of the time.

They hoped that the British would help India get rid of its past backwardness.

The intellectuals, attracted by modern industry and the prospects of modern economic development, hoped that, Britain would industrialize India and introduce modern capitalism.

They believed that Britain, guided by the doctrine of democracy, civil liberties, and sovereignty of the people, would introduce modern science and technology and modern knowledge in India, leading to the cultural and social regeneration of its people.

The emerging unification of the Indian people was an added attraction. Consequently, they supported British rule even during the Revolt of 1857 and described it as 'providential' or "ordained by Gods that be".

The second half of the 19th century witnessed the gradual disillusionment of the intellectuals, for experience increasingly showed that that expectations were misplaced and based on a wrong understanding of the nature and character of British rule. The intellectuals realised that:

In practice, British colonialism was disrupting Indian economy and preventing the rise of modern industry and agriculture.

Instead of promoting democracy and self-government, British administrators were arguing for the imposition of permanent benevolent despotism in India.

They neglected the education of the masses, curbed civil liberties and pursued a policy of divide and rule.

Thus, in such a situation what were the intellectuals supposed to do? Gradually, the intelligentsia created political associations to spread political education and to initiate political work in the country. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian leader to start an agitation for political reforms in India. The Bengal British Indian Society and other associations were founded in 1840s and 1850s to promote general public interests. But these associations were local in character and were dominated by wealthy and aristocratic elements. However, in 1870s and 1880s more modern, explicitly political, and middle class based organizations like Poona Sarvajanik Sabha in Maharashtra, the Indian Association in Bengal, Madras Mahajan Sabha, and Bombay Presidency Association came up all over the country.

10.3.2 Role of Colonial State

The open reactionary character of Lytton's Viceroyalty from 1876 to 1880 quickened the pace of Indian nationalism. We list some of the reactionary methods adopted by Lytton:

The Arms Act of 1878 disarmed the entire Indian people at one stroke.

The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 sought to suppress the growing Indian criticism of British rule.

The reduction of the maximum age for sitting in the Indian Civil Service Examination from 21 years to 19 further reduced the chances of Indians entering the Civil Service.

The holding of a lavish imperial Durbar (in 1877) at a time when millions of Indians were dying of famine and the waging of a costly war against Afghanistan at the cost of the Indian economy.

The removal of import duties on British textile imports threatened the existence of the newly rising Indian textile industry.

All these were clear manifestations of the colonial character of British rule in India. In 1883, the new viceroy, Lord Ripon, tried to assuage Indian feelings by removing a glaring instance of racial discrimination by passing the Ilbert Bill which would enable Indian district and session judges to try Europeans in criminal

cases. The Government was compelled to amend the Bill by a vehement, racialist agitation led by the European in India. These factors created a congenial environment for the growth of Indian nationalism.

10.3.3 Emergence of the Indian National Congress

The time was now ripe for the formation of an all-India organization which could organise and coordinate the political activities of Indians all over the country against foreign rule and exploitation. Various attempts were made in this direction for several years. Surendra Nath Banerjee took the lead by forming the Indian Association. The idea finally got a concrete shape when a large group of political workers such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Justice M.G. Ranade, K.T. Telang and Badruddin Tyabji cooperated with A. O. Hume, a retired English Civil servant, in holding the first session of the Indian National Congress at Bombay in December 1885. The struggle for India's independence was thus launched though on a rather small scale.



7: The First Indian National Congress 1885.

The early nationalist leaders believed that a direct struggle for freedom was not yet on the agenda of history. Instead, they had first to lay the foundations of such struggle. Would you like to know what were then the basic objectives of the early Indian nationalists ?

- i) One of the basic objectives of the early nationalists was to promote the feeling of national unity, to weld India into a nation, to help create an Indian people, to meet the imperialist charge that Indians were not a people or nation but a mere grouping of hundreds of diverse races, languages, castes and religions.
- ii) The second basic objective was to create a national political platform or programme on which all Indians could agree and which could serve as the basis for all-India political activity.
- iii) The third objective was the politicisation of the people and the creation of public interest in political questions and the training and organization of public opinion in the country.
- iv) Another important aim of the time was the creation of an all-India political leadership. No movement without a headquarters, that is, a united leadership. Such a leadership on a country-wide level did not exist in the 1880s. Allied to this was the need to train a common band of political workers or cadre to carry on political work.

Thus, the basic objectives of the early nationalists can best be summed up as the creation of a broad-based anti-colonial, nationalist movement on an all India basis.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Which of the following statements are right or wrong ? Mark (✓) or (X).
- i) After 1857 it became clear that new methods were needed to defeat imperialism.
 - ii) The Indian intellectuals always remained loyal to the British.
 - iii) The British encouraged civil liberties.
 - iv) Indian economy flourished under British rule.

- 2) What were the basic objectives of the early nationalists ? Answer in about 10 lines.

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10.4 MODERATE AND MILITANT NATIONALISTS

The most important contribution of the early nationalists, known as Moderate nationalists, was their economic critique of imperialism and their persistent agitation on economic questions. They analyzed all the three forms of colonial economic exploitation, that is exploitation through trade, industry and finance. They clearly grasped that the essence of British colonialism lay in the subordination of the Indian economy to the British economy. They vehemently opposed the British attempt to develop in India the basic characteristics of a colonial economy, namely. the transformation of India into a supplier of raw materials, a market for British manufacturers, and a field of investment for foreign capital.

10.4.1 Moderates: Aims and Methods

The early nationalists constantly agitated for democratic civil rights, a free press, and a democratic and non-racialist administration. In fact, it was during this period and as a result of political work by the nationalists that democratic ideas began to take root among the Indian people in general, and the intelligentsia in particular. The Moderates also agitated for the spread of modern education, science and technology. In the political field, they demanded reforms that would lead to greater share for Indians in the administration and the legislative machinery.

The weakness of the early nationalists lay in the narrow social base of the movement. The movement did not, as yet, have a wide appeal. It did not penetrate down to the masses. The Moderates' political work was

confined to the urban educated middle classes. Their programme and policies, however, were not confined to the interests of the middle classes. They took up the causes of all sections of the Indian people and represented the interests of the emerging Indian nation against colonial domination.

The Moderates believed in the methods of constitutional agitation within the four walls of law. Thus, they relied on agitation through public meetings and newspapers. They also sent numerous carefully prepared and argued memorials and petitions to the Government. Though on the surface these memorials, etc., were addressed to the Government, their real objective was to educate and politicise the Indian people. For example, Justice Ranade explained to the young G. K. Gokhale in 1891:

You don't realize our place in the history of our country. These memorials are nominally addressed to Government, in reality they are addressed to the people, so that they may learn how to think in these matters because politics of this kind is altogether new in this land.

In spite of their political mildness, they aroused intense hostility from the officials. British officials and statesmen condemned them as disloyal and seditious elements. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, declared in 1900 that it was his ambition to contribute to the death of the Congress. This was because the Moderate had, on however small a scale, generated an anti-imperialist awakening in the country. Their powerful economic critique of imperialism was to serve as the main plank of nationalist agitation in the later years of active mass struggle against British Colonialism. They had, by their economic agitation, undermined the moral foundations of British rule by exposing its cruel, exploitative character. Moreover, the political work of the Moderates was based on a concrete study and analysis of the hard reality of the life of the people rather than on shallow and narrow appeals to religion and mere emotion. Once a sound basis for a national movement was laid, mass struggles could come, and did come, in time.

10.4.2 Militant Nationalists: Aims and Methods

The beginning of the 20th century witnessed the development of the Indian National Movement to a new, higher stage under a new militant nationalist leadership. This was in part the fruition of the earlier nationalist agitation, and in part the consequence of the reassertion of imperialism at the end of the 19th century. The symbol of the new imperial assertion, of despotism and 'efficiency', was Lord Curzon the Viceroy since 1899. Political Indians now despaired of getting political concessions from the rulers through political argument and methods of polite agitation. Indians must, they realized, depend on themselves and take recourse to mass politics and mass agitation around the goal of independence from Britain.

The social and economic conditions of the country also pointed in the same direction. Economic decay and stagnation, the fruits of colonial underdevelopment, were beginning to surface by the end of the 19th century. Symbolic in this respect were the famines that devastated the country from 1887 to 1900, and killed millions.

Several international events at this time contributed to the growth of militant nationalism. The defeat of the Italian army by the Ethiopians in 1896 and Russia by Japan in 1905 exploded the myth of European superiority. Similar was the impact of the revolutionary movements in Ireland, Russia, Egypt, Turkey and China: a united people, who were willing to make sacrifices, were surely capable of overthrowing foreign despotic rule even if it appeared powerful on the surface.

A new political leadership now emerged on the scene. The most prominent in it were Bal Gangadhar Tilak, known as the Lokmanya, Aurobindo Ghose, Bipin Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai. The new leadership believed and preached that Indians must rely on their own efforts, on their own political activity and on their own sacrifices. Their political work and outlook encouraged self-reliance and self-confidence. Moreover,

they possessed deep faith in the strength of the Indian people and mass action. Once the masses took up politics, they asserted, it would be impossible for the British to suppress the national movement. They, therefore, pressed for political work among the masses. They also denied that British rule could be reformed from within. Swaraj or independence was to be the goal of the resurgent national movement.

10.5 SWADESHI MOVEMENT

Thus, conditions were ready for the national Movement to advance to a higher stage. The spark was provided when the movement announced its decision to partition the province of Bengal on 20 July 1905. The decision, as the Government claimed, was allegedly based on administrative grounds. But the people of Bengal saw it as an effort to divide the nationalistically inclined Bengali people and thus stem the rising tide of militant nationalism in Bengal and India.

Political agitation was inaugurated by a general hartal and a day of fasting on 16 October in Calcutta. Huge crowds paraded in the streets of Calcutta and a mammoth meeting of 50,000 was held in the evening. Entire Bengal, from cities to villages, was reverberating with meetings, processions and demonstrations.

Soon a new form of political action was added. All foreign goods were to be boycotted and Swadeshi or Indian-made goods alone were to be used. In many places public burnings of foreign cloth were organized and shops selling foreign cloth were picketed. The new leadership also gave a call for passive resistance to the authorities. This was to take the form of non-cooperation with the Government by boycotting schools and colleges, the courts, and government services. This part of the programme could not, however, be put into practice on a significant scale. The new leadership also raised the slogan of independence from foreign rule. One result was that Dadabhai Naoroji declared in his presidential address to the Congress in December 1906 that the goal of the Congress was "self-government or Swaraj".

The militant leadership succeeded in involving large sections of the rural and urban people in the movement. In particular, students, women and urban workers participated enthusiastically in the movement. The slogans of Swadeshi and Swaraj were soon taken up by other provinces. Boycott of foreign cloth was organized on all-India scale. The entire country began to be united in a bond of common sympathy and common politics.

The Government responded with quick repression. Meetings were banned, newspapers suppressed, political workers jailed, several leaders deported, and students beaten up. Efforts were made to divide the Moderates from Militants and Hindus from Muslims. At the same time, the new leadership failed to discover or implement new forms of organization and struggle which would correspond to their new and advanced political understanding. For example, it failed to put passive resistance into practice. Consequently, the Government succeeded to a large extent in suppressing the movement which did not survive the imprisonment and deportation of Tilak for 6 years, the retirement from active politics of Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose and departure from India of Lala Lajpat Rai.

The youth finding no effective outlet in mass political activity and responding emotionally and heroically to government repression, increasingly adopted revolutionary terrorism and assassination of hated officials as a style of politics. Anushilan and Jugantar were the two important revolutionary groups of this period. However, revolutionary terrorists lacked a mass base and could not continue for long. But they made a valuable contribution to the growth of the national movement. As a historian has put it, "they gave us back the pride of our manhood".



8: Annie Besant

The national movement was in a rather dormant state from 1909 to 1916. But it revived during the First World War when Annie Besant, an English admirer of Indian Culture and the newly released Lokmanya Tilak started a popular, all-India constitutional agitation under the auspices of the two Indian Home Rule Leagues. Indian revolutionaries abroad were also very active during the War of special importance was the establishment of a mass Ghadar (Rebellion) Party in U.S.A. and Canada which had branches in East Asia and South-East Asia and which tried to organize armed uprisings in India.

Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit

- 1) Differentiate between the methods adopted by moderates and militant nationalists Answer in about 10 lines.

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- 2) Why were the moderate nationalists condemned by the British as seditious elements" Answer in about 10 lines

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- 3) What do you understand by Swadeshi Movement? To what extent was this movement an advance in terms of methods adopted by earlier nationalists? Answer in about 100 words.

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10.6 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS REFORM AND CULTURAL RENAISSANCE

Immense intellectual and cultural stirrings characterized 19th and 10th century India; the intellectual life of the Indian people began to undergo a radical transformation. Indian intellectuals were aware of the fact that a vast country like India had been colonized by a handful of foreigners because of the internal weaknesses of Indian society. They, therefore, launched a critique of the evils existing in the Indian social structure and culture. In particular, they were aware of India's lag in the fields of science and social knowledge, for along with colonialism, modern western ideas and culture were also making their entry into India. These were based on rationalism or belief in science and human reason and humanism or the love of human beings and confidence in their capacity to progress. Indian intellectuals were powerfully drawn to rationalism and the humanist conception of society-the conception that every human being is to be respected for his or her own sake. Their efforts to implement these ideals in different fields have been described by historians as Renaissance-analogous to the European Renaissance of the 12th-15th centuries.

Even though the forces of religious and social reform and cultural renewal arose at different times and in different forms and with differing content in different parts of the country, their general perspective was very similar and they represented more or less a common consciousness and understanding of the ills of Indian society and their remedies.

10.6.1 Prominent Reformers: Issues and Views

The person who initiated the process of intellectual and cultural awakening was Raja Rammohan Roy. Even though possessing a great regard for, and learning in, the traditional philosophic systems of the East, he believed that modern culture, a rational and scientific approach to society and religion based on the principles of human dignity and equality alone could regenerate Indian society. Rammohan was followed by a galaxy of intellectuals and religious and social reformers. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, Sayyed Ahmed Khan, Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Jotiba Phule, Swami Dayanand, Justice Ranade, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Viresalingam, Narayana Guru, Vivekananda, E.V Ramaswami Naicker are some of the names that readily come to mind.

The religious reformers vigorously opposed religious dogmatism and blind faith, rigidity of caste, and prevalence of meaningless religious rituals, ceremonies and superstitions. Some of them also opposed the priesthood where it had become too rigid or corrupt. They stood for the reform of existing Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. The social reformers attacked the caste system, especially inequality and oppression based on the caste system. In particular, they condemned the degraded and unequal position of women in Indian society and argued that women and men were equal in intellect and moral sense. They fought for the abolition of the practice of Sati; they attacked polygamy or the system of men having more than one wife; they advocated widow remarriage and education of women; some of them, like Rammohan, argued that women should have the right of inheritance and property.

The battle against the caste system was also in time taken up by intellectuals and reformers belonging to the so called "lower castes". Jotiba Phule, Narayana Guru and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar were three of the most outstanding fighters against the inequities of the caste system. Gandhi linked the struggle against colonialism with the struggle against untouchability. He made it mandatory for a member of the Congress to refuse to practise untouchability and to oppose its practice by others. He founded the All India Harijan Seva Sangh to work for the social, cultural, economic and educational uplift of the harijans.

While the women's cause was taken up mainly by male social reformers in the 19th century, in the 20th century the women themselves came forward to fight for their own social liberation. A number of women's magazines, many of them edited by women, appeared and, in the 1930s the women's movement took an organised form when the All-India Women's Conference was formed. The national movement, trade unions and Kisan Sabhas too took up the cause of women's rights.

It was a result of these reformist efforts and social struggles that complete equality of sexes and a ban on any discrimination on the basis of sex or caste were enshrined in the Constitution of free India.

All the reformers tried to apply the rational approach to religion and society. They wanted religious and social thought and practices to be based not on faith but on human reason and the good of humanity. Opposing blind adherence to authority, they were willing to modify and even abandon religious principles and inherited social traditions if they contradicted reason or logic or were harmful to society. Swami Vivekanand, for example, said:

Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason through which every science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation which apply to the sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied of the science of religion? In my opinion, this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner this is done the better.

Similarly, Sayyid Ahmed Khan all his life opposed blind obedience to tradition and dependence on irrationalism and advocated adoption of a critical approach "So long as freedom of thought is not developed, there can be no civilized life". Even Swami Dayanand, the most conservative of religious reformers, while holding that the Vedas were infallible, said that they were to be interpreted by normal human beings and not by a priestly class. In other words, the Vedas meant what individual reason accepted and indicated. Swami Dayanand, consequently, led a revolt against Hindu orthodoxy.

10.6.2 Their Approach

The religious and social reformers were willing to appeal to tradition in support of their reforms, and often claimed that they were reviving pure beliefs and practices of the past. Many appealed to the ancient scriptures. But, interestingly, the past was evoked essentially to support the new outlook, tradition was used as an instrument to make reform more palatable. And whenever and wherever tradition conflicted with the suggested reforms, it was declared to be false or even frontally opposed. As pointed out earlier, the ultimate appeal was not to the past, but to human reason and social good. Justice Ranade, for example, wrote: "The dead and the buried or burnt are dead, buried and burnt once for all, and the dead past cannot, therefore, be revived."

Similarly, Gandhiji's entire campaign for the "root and branch removal of untouchability" was based on humanism and reason. While arguing that untouchability had no sanctions in the Hindu shastras, he declared that shastras should be ignored if they went against human dignity. Truth, he said, could not be confined within the covers of a book.

Apart from gains in the field of religious and social welfare, the reformers' work contributed to the growth of patriotism. It enhanced their self-confidence and confidence in their own culture. Even while contributing to the opening of their minds to the winds of change and modern ideas, it prevented blind copying of the West. It was a part of what historian K.N. Panikkar has described as cultural defence against the colonialization of the culture and ideology of the Indian people. As Jawaharlal Nehru was to put it:

The rising middle classes were politically inclined and were not so much in search of a religion; but they wanted some cultural roots to cling on to, something that gave them assurance of their own worth, something that would reduce the sense of frustration and humiliation that foreign conquest and rule had produced.

After 1920, many nationalists and reformers applied the techniques of Satyagraha and mass agitation and mobilization to fight for democratization of society and religious reform. This often brought them into conflict with the colonial authorities, thus directly linking and even merging the reform movements with the anti-imperialist struggle. Two prime examples of this were the Akali movement for the reform of Gurudwaras or Sikh temples in Punjab during the early 1920s and Gandhi's struggle against untouchability during the 1920s and early 1930s.

10.6.3 Their Methods

Nationalist intellectuals and leaders saw that not only Indian culture had to be renovated and modernized but also made popular. For this purpose they advocated, on the one hand, the spread of modern education and, on the other, the development of modern Indian languages.

Though the colonial authorities initially, from 1830s to 1860s, encouraged modern education, they soon began to drag their feet when they found that many among the newly educated Indians were taking to nationalism. Indians now took to promoting schools and colleges on their own. During the Swadeshi agitation and the Non-cooperation Movement (1920-22), the nationalists gave a call for a system of National Education outside the colonial framework. Hundreds of National Schools and Colleges and several National Universities came up at that time. But it was, in the main, through the Indian languages press and literature that cultural renaissance and cultural struggle was carried on:

- i) From the beginning of the 19th century nationalist and modern Indians, made Indian languages the vehicle for the popularization of their reformist and nationalist ideas. To enable Indian languages to play this role successfully, they undertook such humdrum tasks as preparation of primers, etc. For example, both Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Rabindranath Tagore wrote Bengali primers which are being used till this day. From the 1860s, nationalist leaders agitated for inclusion of Indian languages in the college curriculum and for a bigger role for them in the educational system. In fact, the spread of modern ideas among the mass of people occurred primarily through Indian languages. The most important role in this respect was that of the press; and once again pioneering work was done by Rammohan Roy who brought out journals in Bengali, Persian and Hindi to spread scientific, literary and political knowledge among the people. In Maharashtra, a similar role was played by Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as Lokhitavadi. Hundreds of Indian language newspapers and journals made their appearance during the 19th century. They were started not as profit-making business enterprises, but as labour of love and social commitment with a view to disseminate nationalist and reformist ideas among the people.

There is hardly a major modern Indian political or social figure who did not edit or write for the popular Indian language press. The **Amrit Bazar Patrika**, **Som Prakash**, and **Sanjivani** in Bengali;

Rast Goftar and **Gujarat Samachar** in Gujarati; **Indu prakash**, **Dhyan Prakash** , **Kesari** and **Sudharak** in Marathi; **Swadesmitra** in Tamil; **Andhra Prakasika**, **Andhra Patrika** in Telugu; **Matrubhoomi** in Malayalam; the **Hindi Pradeep**, **Elindustani**, **Aj** and **Pratap** in Hindi; **Azad**, **Akbar-i-Am** and **Koh-i-Noor** in Urdu; and **Utkal Dipika** in Oriya, were some of the major newspapers of the time.

- ii) Modern literature in Indian languages in the form of poetry, novels and short stories, and essays was the second form through which cultural renaissance and patriotic sentiments were manifested as well as promoted. From about the middle of the 19th century, powerful literary trends emerged in nearly all the Indian languages. Already by 1860s, patriotic poems and songs in Bengali and other languages had made their appearance. These two genres of literature were to become major instruments of mass political agitation and mobilization in the 20th century. Almost every Indian language was to throw up major poets during the 19th and 20th centuries. Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam in Bengali; Bharatendu Harishchandra and Maithili Sharan Gupta in Hindi; Muhammad Iqbal, Altaf Hussain Hali and Josh Malihabadi in Urdu; Subramaniya Bharati in Tamil; Kumaran Asan, and Vallathol in Malayalam; Lakshminath Bezbarua in Assamese, were some of the major poets of 19th and 20th centuries.

Nationalist drama had its beginnings in 1860 with Dinabandhu Mitra's play **Nil Darpan** which dealt with the British indigo planters' oppression of the peasants. India also produced powerful novelists and short story writers who took up nationalist and reformist themes, often dealing with class and caste oppression and the sorry plight of women in Indian society. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra, Rabindranath Tagore and Prem Chand were some of the major writers whose novels and short stories were translated and published in nearly all the Indian languages. Essays were another genre through which Indian nationalists and reformers spread their ideas. Some of the major essayists of the 19th century were Gopal Hari Deshmukh, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar and Viresalingam. Cultural renaissance was also manifested in music, painting and other arts and later in films.

The person who strode the cultural scene for over 60 years was Rabindranath Tagore who left his mark on almost every aspect of literature-poetry, novel, short story, drama and essays. In his old age he also took to painting. He was a major inspiring figure of the Swadeshi Movement. In 1919, he renounced the title of a Knight (sir) in protest against the Jallianwalla massacre. In 1913, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. He also founded the Vishwabharati University at Shantiniketan to promote Indian culture and to impart national education.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your answer with that given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Which of the following statements are right or wrong. Mark (✓) or (X).
- i) Religious reformers supported dogmatism and blind faiths.
 - ii) Sati and polygamy were attacked by reformers.
 - iii) Struggle against untouchability was a matter of great importance for Gandhi.
 - iv) The Indian language newspapers contributed in the growth of nationalist feelings.

- v) The play Nil Darpan dealt with the condition of emigrant Indians.
- 2) Discuss in about five lines the issues taken up by reformers in relation to upliftment of women.

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10.7 LET US SUM UP

The first war of independence demonstrated that the Indians were no longer prepared to accept servitude. However, the failure of the rebellion demonstrated the weaknesses of the struggle. The Indian middle class came forward to initiate a new form of struggle based on creating an anti-colonial awareness at an all India level. The repressive policies of the colonial administration helped the task of the early nationalists. They carried out a campaign through press and petitions. Soon there emerged a section among the nationalist leaders who wanted to shed away the constitutionalist approach and adopt other methods of struggle. They came to be known as militant nationalists.

The British continued with their repressive policies, and the partition of Bengal gave a new turn to the national movement. The Swadeshi Movement, though still not fully a mass movement, was a major step towards mass mobilization. Another new trend was the emergence of revolutionary terrorism. There was yet another aspect to the national movement. Many social and religious reformers, guided by rationalism and humanism fought against the evils that existed in Indian society. The press and literature contributed immensely towards a new awakening in India.

10.8 KEY WORDS

Dogmatism: Uncritical acceptance of any belief or ideology.

Mass Mobilization: Process of bringing mass of people together for a definite political objective.

National Consciousness: Awareness of belonging to a nation

(a) through a process of struggle and self-realization, and

(b) through education and mobilization by the nationalist leaders.

Nationalism: An ideology which emerged in opposition to colonial domination, secondly it offered itself as a social, political, economic alternative to colonialism. In contrast to Europe where it arose due to the need of a united market, in India it arose as a specific need of Indian people to find an alternative to colonial rule.

Patriotism: Feeling of loyalty towards one's own nation.

Zamindars: Permanent holders of land in the countryside whose share of revenue was fixed by the British Government.

10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS/ EXERCISES

Check Your Progress I

- 1) See sub-sec. 10.2.1
- 2) i) ✓ ii) X iii) X iv) ✓
- 3) i) For example, Scindhia of Gwalior

Holkar of Indore

Nizam of Hyderabad

- ii) Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi

Kunwar Singh

Tantya Tope

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) ✓ ii) X iii) X iv) X
- 2) See Sub-sec. 10.3.3

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Sub-sec. 10.4.1 and 10.4.2
- 2) See Sub-sec. 10.4.1
- 3) See section 10.5

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) i) X ii) ✓ iii) ✓ iv) ✓ v) X
- 2) See Sub-sec. 10.6.1