

UNIT 3 THE RISE OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to :

- learn how the colonial rule affected the different classes of Indian People,
- list the main factors which helped the growth of national consciousness, and
- explain the way Indian masses and middle class responded to the challenge of colonial rule and assess how the national consciousness took an organised form.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Units 1 and 2 of this Block you studied the process through which India was being exploited as a British colony. You also studied how the process of colonisation affected the economic, political and social conditions of India. In this Unit we will discuss how British policies developed a national consciousness in the nineteenth century. Our emphasis would be on the factors responsible for the growth of the consciousness and the shape it took during the period under study.

The rise of national consciousness in the nineteenth century was essentially the result of the British rule. The economic, political and social changes brought about by the British rule resulted in the oppression of all classes of Indian people giving rise to a wide spread dissatisfaction among the masses. Moreover, the uniform system of administration, development of post and telegraph, railways, printing press and educational institutions created by the British primarily as measures for running an effective administration also became instrumental in providing favourable conditions for the rise and growth of national movement. In this Unit we will discuss in some detail the role of some of these factors.

3.2 RUIN OF INDIAN ECONOMY

The British economic policies in India led to the ruin of Indian agriculture and handicraft industries. The peasants, artisans and other classes were badly impoverished in the process. You have already studied the details of the economic impact (Unit-2) which showed itself in the form of de-industrialisation, commercialisation of agriculture, famines etc. Here we will mention very briefly how the British rule changed our economic life during the nineteenth century.

3.2.1 Agriculture

The British agrarian policy was mainly aimed at drawing out maximum land revenue. In the Permanent Settlement areas the land revenue was fixed for the **Zamindars** (to be paid to the State). The Zamindars kept charging more from the peasants than what they had to pay to the State. Most of the time the peasants had to borrow money from money lenders. The money lenders charged exorbitant rate of interest for the money they lent to the peasants. As you can yourself imagine, whenever the peasants tried to resist the exploitation by landlords and money lenders, the official machinery helped the latter. A large number of cash crops (like indigo, cotton, sugarcane) were taken by the British on dictated prices to be used as raw materials. Cotton and indigo cultivators were the worst affected. As a result of the British land revenue policy large number of peasants were reduced to landless labourers. The number of landless labourers was as high as 20% of the population (52.4 million with their dependents) in 1901.

3.2.2 Industry

When we come to industry, we find that the artisans were also facing great hardships. Restrictions were imposed on import of Indian textiles in Britain while the British could bring their machine-made textiles virtually without any taxes to India. The Indian artisan was not in a position to compete with the goods produced by machines in England. With the coming of machines the artisans had suffered in England. But in that country they were soon compensated by alternate employment opportunities in new factories. In India, machine-made products were coming from England, and, the development of factories in India was very slow as it was disfavoured by State. This being the situation a large number of artisans were rendered jobless. The workers in factories, mines, and plantations also suffered. They were paid low wages and lived in extreme poverty.

The newly emerging Indian industrialists also faced hardship due to the government's policies relating to trade, tariff, taxation and transport. They could see how Britain was using India mainly as a source of raw materials for British industries or in the later period as a place for the investment of British capital. The British capitalists who had vast resources were provided with all the facilities. The Indian capitalist class that had just started emerging and needed government patronage, was, on the other hand completely ignored.

The Indian Scene in 19th Century

You can see from this brief description that almost all the sections of Indian population were suffering under the British rule. However, this discontent could not automatically lead to the development of a new consciousness among the people. This discontent expressed itself at times, in the form of sporadic revolts against some officer, zamindar or a new regulation. There were a number of factors due to which the dissatisfaction with the foreign rule did not generate a proper national consciousness. Vastness of the country with backward means of communication, lack of education, absence of a common language, and differences in the nature of grievances in different regions due to differences in the working of the administrative system were some of the important reasons.

Check Your Progress 1

1) How did the British policies in India affect the Indian economy?

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2) List the two main classes of Indian society which were ruined by the colonial rule.

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- 3) Why was it that during the early years of colonial rule the Indian opposition to the foreign rule could not be properly channelised?

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3.3 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Due to the factors we have mentioned above the British were also facing problems in maintaining effective control of the government. To overcome these **deficiencies** the British evolved some administrative measures and new policies. These measures also helped in the development of national consciousness among Indians. Let us now examine these policies and their effects.

3.3.1 Unified System of Administration

For a better exploitation of the Indian resources the British brought large parts of the country under a uniform system of administration. Land revenue administration, police, law and order machinery and judicial system were some of the important measures adopted for bringing about this uniformity in administration.

3.3.2 Communication Network

Post and telegraph services were extended and improved. All the major towns were linked with telegraph. After 1853, work on Railway lines was started. The plan was to link the presidencies with each other and the hinterland with major ports. The main advantage of Railways for the British was a cheap mode of transport to carry goods to ports and back. But once the railway network developed, passenger traffic also increased, and people living at distant places got new opportunity to interact with one another.

3.3.3 Printing Press

The introduction of the printing press made the transmission of ideas and learning less expensive. A number of newspapers and periodicals started appearing. Through these publications the problems in different parts of the country could be shared by people. You can guess from your own experience how the press could play an important role in the development of national consciousness among the literate sections of the people.

3.3.4 New Education System

The British introduced a new system of education which was mainly derived from the West – both in form and content. The main idea behind this system was to create a loyal section of Indians who would effectively carry out clerical and lower administrative tasks for the British. As Macaulay put it, the idea was to form “a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect”.

However the modern educational system familiarised the educated classes with the ideas of equality, liberty and nationalism, in an atmosphere of growing disillusionment with the colonial rule. The education system itself bred disillusionment as it was elitist, serving only a small section, while as many as 92% Indians were illiterate even in 1921. So the educated Indians turned towards contemporary nationalist movements in Europe (like German unification, Italian unification and nationalist movement against Turkish empire). They then were exposed to the works of liberal writers and thinkers like John Milton, Shelly, Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Rousseau, Voltaire, Mazzini and Garibaldi. The Indians who were studying in England found on their return to India that they were denied all the rights which were taken for granted in the European countries.

- 2) Which of the following princely states were not annexed by the British.
- Sind
 - Gwalior
 - Awadh
 - Jhansi
 - Hyderabad
 - Satara
 - Baroda
- 3) State whether the following statements are True or False.
- There was no racial discrimination in judicial matters in the 19th Century in India.
 - The British gave importance to the development of Railways so that Indians might travel fast.
 - The British tried to establish a uniform system of administration in India.
 - The Introduction of Printing Press made the transmission of ideas cheap.

3.4 THE INDIAN RESPONSE

The Indians opposed British exploitation and the harmful policies at different levels. Gradually this resistance took the form of a national movement, although the process in the initial stages was rather slow. The Indian resistance may broadly be divided into two forms; (i) the peasant and tribal movements, and (ii) the middle class opposition.

3.4.1 The Peasant and Tribal Movements

In the nineteenth century we come across a number of peasant and tribal uprisings. The early uprisings were not consciously nationalist uprisings, but, in due course this contributed to the emergence of nationalist consciousness. To begin with, these peasant and tribal revolts were organised against the British oppressive policies. According to Sumit Sarkar, for at least a century after Plassey there were revolts led by traditional elements (dispossessed local chiefs, zamindars or religious figures). These revolts were predominantly of a lower class social character. Kathleen Gough has compiled a list of 77 peasant uprisings involving violence.

The tribal movements were militant. K. Suresh Singh in his study of the tribals, says that, they revolted more often and far more violently than any other community including peasants in India. Some important peasant and tribal revolts are mentioned below.

There is a very long list of peasant and tribal revolts spread throughout India. Here we will mention a few of them which are important. Later you will read in detail in a separate unit about peasant movements. In the first half of the nineteenth century Travancore revolt (1800-09), Bhil revolt (1818-31), Ho revolt (1820-21) and Khasi revolt (1829-31) were among important peoples movements. And so were Wahabi movement (1830-69), Kol revolt (1831), Faraizi movement (1834-47) and Santhal revolt (1855-56). In most of these revolts the leadership and support was provided by the feudal chiefs. These revolts cannot be called the conscious nationalist movements in the modern sense. The most important factor behind all these movements was a combined protest against British policies. At times these were also sparked off by some oppressive policies of a zamindar, money lender or an administrative officer. During the same period we come across a number of protests by town people against the British. Strike in Banaras (1810-11) and the revolt of Bareilly (1816) are important examples. In the case of Banaras, the city people on strike against the levying of House Tax while, in Bareilly, the protest was directed against the Police Tax, which was levied to provide police protection to the citizens. In the case of Banaras the British had to withdraw the tax while in Bareilly people had to pay the tax.

The Revolt of 1857

The accumulated feelings of discontent and dissatisfaction with the British rule gave rise to the revolt of 1857. The revolt spread to most of the Northern and Central India.

“Firstly, in Hindustan they have exacted as revenue rupees 300 where only 200 were due, and rupees 500 where but 400 were demandable, and still they are solicitous to raise their demands. The people must therefore be ruined and beggared. Secondly, they have doubled and quadrupled and raised tenfold the chowkedaree tax and have wishes to ruin the people. Thirdly, the occupation of all respectable and learned men is gone, and millions are destitute of the necessaries of life. How far can we detail the oppression of the tyrants. Gradually matters arrived at such a pitch that the Government had determined to subvert everyone’s religion”

In the revolt we notice for the first time that some sort of nationalist feelings were inspiring the people. This has been highlighted by Dr. S.N. Sen in his work **Eighteen Fifty-Seven**. The revolt was ruthlessly suppressed and the British Government took the control of India from the East India Company into its own hands. Even after the suppression of this major revolt popular uprisings in India continued throughout the nineteenth century.

Peasant Movements after 1857

The important movements in the second half of the 19th century were Indigo revolt (1859-60) in Bengal, Kuki revolt (1860-90) in Tripura, Kuka revolt (1869-72) in Punjab, Pabna Peasant Movement (1872-73) in Bengal, Vasudev Balvant Phadke’s Revolt (1879) in Maharashtra and Birsa Munda’s revolt (1899-1900) in South Bihar. Thus we notice that throughout the nineteenth century Indian masses were struggling against the British rule. These revolts invariably ended in failure but they fostered a fighting spirit and strengthened national consciousness among the people.

Check Your Progress 3

1) What was the nature of early peasant and tribal revolts?

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2) In the above section you read a portion of the proclamation issued by the ‘rebels’ in Delhi in 1857. List 3 main grievances of the Indian people on the basis of this proclamation.

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3.4.2 Middle Class Consciousness

During the nineteenth century, apart from popular uprisings and revolts at the mass level, a new consciousness was developing in the educated sections and middle classes. It was this middle class consciousness, which became the chief medium for the channelisation of popular discontent, and, was instrumental in the development of national consciousness in India.

The educated classes began to critically examine the Indian society and the awakened sections made all-out efforts for reforms. Ram Mohan Roy was the pioneer in this field. He established Brahma Samaj to fight social evils. Dayananda Saraswati formed the Arya Samaj, Vivekananda established Ramakrishna Mission. A number of other organisations were formed for doing away with the social evils like *Sati*, untouchability, rituals etc. These reform movements, though confined in a large part to the middle class sections, developed a national social consciousness among Indian people, and, deepened their sense of belonging to a common culture.

Besides this social consciousness political consciousness was also developing. As noticed earlier, the educated Indian middle class which included merchants, traders, industrialists, professional groups like lawyers, teachers, journalists and doctors was also suffering under the British rule. As compared to peasants and workers this class could see more clearly the imperial designs and analyse the nature of colonial rule. In

the beginning (first half of the 19th century), this class was of the opinion that the means of communication, railways and other industrial enterprises were going to benefit Indians. Under this understanding they therefore supported the British policies but gradually it became clear that the British administrative measures were to help the British rule, and, their economic policies were benefiting the British merchants and capitalists. Once the Indian middle class realised this, they started protesting against the colonial rule. But unlike the peasants, tribals and workers whose protest was expressed in the form of uprisings and revolts, this class followed a different policy. The middle class worked in two ways.

- 1) They started writing books, articles and publishing newspapers to critically analyse the British policies and developing consciousness among the masses.
- 2) The second method adopted by the middle classes was to form organisations, associations and societies for joint programmes and activities.

Let us first examine the literary activities. We have earlier referred to the introduction of the printing press, and its utility, in the transmission and diffusion of ideas. Ram Mohan Roy was a pioneer in this field. He produced a number of books and started a journal called **Sambad Kaumudi** (Bengali) which published several articles on varied themes. Dinabandhu Mitra wrote the play **Nil Darpan** depicting the plight of indigo cultivators. Bankimchandra wrote **Anand Math**, full of nationalist aspirations. In Urdu a large number of works were written in prose and poetry about the degrading conditions of the masses and destruction of many urban centres. In Marathi, Hindi and Tamil also a number of works were published. A number of periodicals and newspapers in different languages started publication. These publications were in English and vernacular languages. The prominent among these were: the **Hindu Patriot**, **Amrita Bazar Patrika**, **Bengali**, **Sanjivani** in Bengal, **Native Opinion**, **Mehratta** and **Kesari** in Bombay, the **Hindu**, **Andhra Patrika** and **Kerala Patrika** in Madras, the **Hindustan** and **Azad** in U.P., the **Tribune** and the **Akhbar-i-am** in Punjab. By 1877 there were as many as 169 newspapers in the vernacular. A number of nationalist literary figures also came into prominence such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Vishnu Shastri Chiplukar, Subramaniam Bharti, Bhartendu Harish Chandra and Altaf Hussain Hali.

The second method adopted by the middle class was to form associations and organisations. Some of the early organisations were the Landholder's Society (1838), Bengal British India Society (1843), British India Association (1851) in Bengal; the Bombay Association and Deccan Association (1852) in Maharashtra, the Madras Native Association in Madras. The main aim of these organisations was collective action against the British policies harming their interests. Their methods were mostly legal actions in courts or petition against the East India Company and British parliament. They wanted reforms to be included in the Company's charter of 1853. But the charter of 1853 failed to satisfy their aspirations.

After the take over of India's administration by the British Crown in 1858, new hopes kindled among the Indian middle classes. They thought that the British government would stop the economic exploitation and work for the welfare of the country. Soon they realised that the British Crown too was out to exploit India economically. Now the political activities increased and a number of new organisations appeared. In England was formed London India Association which was later merged with the East India Association (1866). In Maharashtra was formed Poona Sarwajanik Sabha (1870) and Indian Association (1876). In Bengal was formed Indian National Conference (1883) and in Madras Mahajan Sabha.

As compared to the earlier organisations formed by middle class elements these organisations were political. Their main aim was to protest against the British policies through petitions and resolutions. They tried to achieve mass awakening through public meetings and statements. They also exchanged views on the national issues. Actually these organisations opened the way for the formation of a strong all India organisation, Indian National Congress in 1885. You will read in detail about the foundation of Indian National Congress in a separate unit of your course. Around the same time the British Government passed some repressive measures like Lincoln Act Vernacular Press Act, lowering the age for Indian Civil Services etc. You will read about these measures and see how far Lord Lytton (1876-80) the Viceroy was responsible for them. The reaction to these measures was very strong. The main newspaper of Bengal, **Bangalee** wrote:

“To Lord Lytton must belong the credit of having done much by his repressive measures towards stimulating the public life of this country and for this service certainly his Lordship will be entitled to the gratitude of our country (June 12, 1880)”.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Why did the educated Indian middle class become disillusioned with the British after 1857?

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- 2) How did newspapers and journals help in the growth of national consciousness?

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- 3) How did the formation of organisations help in the growth of National consciousness?

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3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit you have studied how National Consciousness gradually conveyed and developed in India during the British rule. This consciousness mainly developed as a result of British policies in India.

In fact it grew as a reaction to British policies although some of their policies indirectly helped the growth of such a consciousness. At the mass level the popular uprisings in different parts of the country strengthened national consciousness in their own way. The middle classes gradually developed this consciousness and ultimately channelised it into the national movement.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Racial discrimination: The British attitude of preferring English or white skinned people for higher govt. jobs, reserving separate compartments for them in trains etc.

Intellectual Ferment: The phenomenon of interaction and development of new/old ideas which in 19th century led to both generation of new ideas and revival of old ones.

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The British Policies affected the agriculture and artisan production adversely. Read again the Sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 and answer.
- 2) i) Peasant

- 3) The Indian protest and opposition during the early years could not be properly channelised because different section of Indian people were secluded from one another and they were spread over a wide area. Besides, the means of communication were backward.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) i) The British laid the railway lines to provide quick and cheap mode of transport for goods.
ii) With the development of printing press the news ideas and literary works could be printed at a very low cost.
iii) The British wanted to educate Indians to employ them in lower Government jobs. Also read Sub-section 3.3.4.
- 2) (ii), (v), (vii)
- 3) (i) False (ii) False (iii) True (iv) True

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The early peasant and tribal revolts were spontaneous and lacked an organised effort. Read Section 3.4.1 and answer in your own words.
- 2) i) The increase in land revenue.
ii) The toll tax (chowkeedaree tax) was increased causing loss to merchants.
iii) The respectable people have lost their position and jobs.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Before 1857, the educated middle class thought that the British rule would modernise India and the Indians would enjoy the fruits of this modernisation. But after 1857 the British repressive policies kept on increasing and the people were denied all their rights. Read Section 3.4.2.
- 2) Read Section 3.4.2 and answer.
- 3) The formation of different organisations in the country provided an opportunity for collective action and channelised the people's enthusiasm towards broader national interests, thus promoting the growth of national consciousness.