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Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University

Master Degree

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

PG HT S4-03(DSC)

SEMESTER-IV

Nation and Nationalism

HISTORY

PG HT S4-03(DSC)

TWO YEARMASTER'S DEGREE COURSE
(C.B.C.S, Accordance with NEP-2020)

SEMESTER IV

NATION AND NATIONALISM
HISTORY

Surya Kumar Bhuyan School of Social Sciences

Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University

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COURSE INTRODUCTION : 'Nation' and 'Nationalism

This course is Core Course for MA 4th Semester learners of History under Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. A nation is understood as a community united by shared history, culture, language, or political aspirations, while a nation-state is a sovereign political entity representing a nation. Nationalism is examined as an ideology and political movement that seeks to promote national identity, unity, and self-determination. This Unit is an essential reading on the understanding of 'Nation' and 'Nationalism', the various debates centering around it.

The first unit is titled 'Introduction' which introduces the concepts of the nation, nation-state, and nationalism.

The second unit titled 'Nation as a Concept' explores the historical origins and evolution of the idea of the nation. It discusses various approaches to understanding nations while highlighting scholarly debates over whether nations are ancient, modern, or socially constructed communities.

The third unit titled 'Theories on Nationalism' examines the principal theories of nationalism.

The fourth unit titled 'Nationalism and Ethnicity' examines theories of identity formation, ethnic conflict, and the social, political, economic, and historical causes of ethnic tensions within nation-states.

The fifth unit is titled 'Nationalism and Gender' and it analyses nationalism through the lens of gender.

The sixth and seven unit titled 'Nationalism in Europe I' and 'Nationalism in Europe II' discusses the origins of European nationalism are traced from the intellectual movements of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It studies the relationship between nationalism, imperialism, fascism, and the two World Wars.

The eighth unit titled 'Nationalism and the Middle East' explores the development of Arab nationalism is examined within the context of Ottoman decline, colonial intervention, and the quest for Arab unity.

The ninth and tenth unit titled 'Nationalism in Asia I' and 'Nationalism in Asia II' explores the evolution of nationalism in China, Japan, Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

The Units eleven, twelve and thirteen titled ‘Nationalism in India I’,‘Nationalism in India II’ and ‘Nationalism in India III’ introduces the concepts of colonialism, imperialism, and Indian nationalism. Part II examines the competing ideas of nationalism articulated by Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Part III focuses on regionalism and sub-regionalism within the Indian nation-state.

The fourteenth Unit titled‘Nationalism in Africa’ examines the emergence of African nationalism as a response to colonial domination and racial discrimination.

While going through this paper,you will notice that some boxes are put in the left hand or right hand side of the text. These boxes are meant to serve the purpose of in-text glossary for you. Again, you may find some boxes marked with: “LET US KNOW”. These boxes will provide you with some additional interesting and relevant information. The boxes marked with “ACTIVITY” will help you in making your learning more active and efficient. And, at the end of each section, you will get “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. It will be better if you solve the problems put in these boxes immediately after you go through the sections of the units and then match your answers with “ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” given at the end of each unit.

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UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION

Unit Structure

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1.4 Nation-State

1.5 Defining Nationalism

1.6 Let Us Sum Up

1.7 Further Readings

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.9 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain the basic concepts of nation, nation-state, and nationalism**.**
- understand the meaning and definitions of a nation**.**
- examine the meaning and definitions of nationalism**.**

1.2. INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to the basic concepts of nation, nation-state and nationalism, and how these ideas have been understood by historians and other social scientists. In academic arena, scholars have analyzed the concept of nation from political, psychological, cultural and ethnic point of view. Similarly, the concept of nation-state is a political organization, which represents the political expression of people's collective will. However, nationalism plays a significant role in linking the ideas of nation and nation-state. By studying this unit, you will not only understand the theoretical concepts of nation, nation-state and nationalism but know various aspects of modern world, such as political movements, identity politics and communalism.

To properly understand the concepts of nation and nationalism, it is important to first understand its historical background. The foundation of the modern nation-state was laid in 1648, when the Peace of Westphalia was signed. This was a very important diplomatic settlement reached in Europe at the end of the Thirty Years' War. This settlement established a new principle- that every sovereign state would rule

within its own territory, and other states would not interfere. This settlement established a new principle- that every sovereign state world rule within its own territory, and other states would not interfere. This principle later became the foundation of state sovereignty, the core idea of the modern international system.

But the 'states'' at the time of Westphalia were not 'nation-states'. These were dynastic monarchies- meaning their legitimacy came not from the 'people' but from the royal bloodline and the divine right of kings. A king who was the ruler of France was a representative of the French crown, not of the French 'nation'. The legitimacy of a king came from 'God and lineage' and not from his 'subjects'.

This picture began to change in the 18th century. Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu proposed a new idea: sovereignty resided in the people, not in rulers. Rousseau's concept of 'volonte generale' (general will) argued that government should represent the will of the 'nation'. This was a revolutionary shift from monarchical legitimacy to democratic (popular) legitimacy. The most dramatic and concrete expression of this shift came in French Revolution (1789). When the French Revolution overthrew Louis XVI, a new principle was declared: sovereignty no longer resided in the nation, but in the crown. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789) state: "The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation". For the first time in a major political upheaval, the nation- not the king was declared the supreme political authority. France is considered the starting point of modern nationalism. The French Revolution introduced ideas like "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," which encouraged democracy and rational thinking. From this moment, modern nationalism was truly born.

In the 19th century, nationalism changed a lot in Europe. It became the idea that a nation and its people were important and sometimes even better than others. During this time, new political systems like constitutional monarchy and capitalist republics developed. These systems slowly gave people rights like freedom of speech, freedom of press, and freedom of news. In fact, after the French revolution, these nationalist ideas spread throughout Europe through Napoleon. Wherever Napoleon sent his armies- Holland, Italy, Germany, Poland- the people there began to question: "Where are our people? What is our nation?" Resistance against Napoleon also fueled nationalism- such as in the German Empire and Spain. This was "reaction nationalism", form of nationalism that asserted a unique identity against foreign domination. The unification movements of Italy and Germany (1860s-1870s), the Greek independence struggle (1821), and the national movements of Poland all revolved around this principle. In sociology, this is called the "principle of nationality". In Germany, Otto von Bismarck played a significant role in the formation of nation state. He used military power to unite different regions under Prussia and create one strong nation. nationalism in Italy grew stronger, especially because of foreign rule. One of the main leaders was Giuseppe Mazzini, who spread ideas of unity and led the movement for a united Italy.Thus, in the 19th century, nationalism became a strong force to the rise of nation states in Europe. During this period, leaders, thinkers and all the common people played significant role in building the modern nation states.

1.3. DEFINING NATION

In political science and history, the notion of nation is multifaceted. A nation generally refers to an idea that a group of people perceive themselves as belonging to a shared community. The feeling of unity does not arise naturally; rather, it develops through **shared historical experiences, culture, political struggles, and collective imagination**. The nation therefore is a social and historical creation. The idea of nation is closely associated with values such as freedom, justice, and self-rule.In general historians argue that concepts of state and nation are closely interconnected, and whenever reference is made to national culture or ethnic traditions, it often reflects, at least partially, a synthetic creation shaped by the state.

The idea of the nation has numerous meanings. The concept of nation occupies an important place in the contemporary modern politics. The word 'nation' is widely used in the study of history, political science and economics. It is noted that the word 'nation' is derived from the Latin word 'natio', which means born. This gives the term racial or ethnical meanings. Etymologically, a nation represents people welded together in a society by ties of blood relationship. In fact, the idea of nation refers to a population having the same race, language, traditions and culture. In otherwords, nation is a culturally homogenous group of people who share a common history, language, emotions, institutions, and historical background. Actually, nation is often understood in relation to the people of a particular country. In this context, citizenship is a significant aspect in defining the concept of nation. It is also important to note that a nation does not merely signify a territory or a state, but rather represents a powerful framework of shared belonging, loyalty and political imagination. The people are not only politically connected; they also experience a deep 'sense of belonging' to the community. This moral and psychological attachment provides a strong foundation to an otherwise abstract concept of nation.

Ernest Ranan, in his famous work '*What is a Nation?*' (1882), argued that a nation is a 'spiritual principle'. A nation is formed when people acknowledge their shared past memories and desire to live together. A nation is not just history, but a decision to live together in the present. Similarly, Rupert Emerson, in his work *"From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples'* (1960), stated that a nation is a community in which people 'feel mutual solidarity'. This solidarity is based on two things: (1) common heritage and shared destiny, (2) nationhood as a conscious feeling.

However, M.H. Johnson stated that a nation is a group of people who live in a territory and want to establish or preserve their own state. A nation reflects a shared destiny and responsibility among people. Also, G.J Mangone considers a nation to be the largest cultural group of people who share a common 'culture and consciousness' and usually live within a single territory. Nationhood does not depend on statehood or political autonomy

L.J. Landshut also defines nation in terms of 'unique community', which has the natural right to 'political self-determination and sovereignty'.R. Holmes states nation as an ethnic group that lives in its homeland or a specific territory.' Similarly, a popular definition on nation is by Max Weber, a famous social scientist of German. He defines nation as a 'prestige community', by which he meant a group of people who share a

common dignity and collective identity. He also stated that the idea of nation emerges from the two factors: material interest of the state and a belief in shared cultural heritage.

According to Josef Dobrovsky, a nation is a society that operates under a single language and a single code of laws and exists for collective welfare. For him, language is a core element of a nation.Josef Jungmann, however, considers a nation to be a large community that speaks one language, follows one law, and works for the common good.

Another influential interpretation is by Karl Deutsch. He subscribes nation as a group of people linked together by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbors'.

According to František Palacký, a nation is a stage in the natural development of human society. Family and clan are followed by a nation, characterized by a common language. From this nation, the state develops. In similar manner, Tomas G. Masaryk says, 'a nation is a combination of territory, language, and political thinking. Nationality is formed not only by language but also by culture, literature, morality, and religion'. Francis Weyer defines nation as a group of people who have a common origin, language, culture, and history.

Several political thinkers and sociologists have explained the notion of a *nation* in various way. But most important aspect is that nation is more than a political unit. Undoubtedly, nation can be understood in an ethnic or cultural sense.

1.4 NATION STATE

The concept of nation-state is central to modern political history. The evolution of the modern nation-state is the result of a long historical process in which simple political communities gradually transformed into complex political organizations. Initially, human beings lived in small communities because humans are social animals and cannot live alone. Collective life required rules and regulations, which led to the emergence of political communities and, subsequently, the development of the state.

To understand the nation-state, it is crucial to understand the relationship between the nation and the state. A nation is a cultural and psychological concept where people feel a sense of unity and belonging among themselves. This unity develops through common history, culture, language, traditions, and shared experiences. According to Ramsay Muir, a nation is a group of people who consider themselves inherently connected to each other and who do not accept external domination.

A nation-state exists when the terms nation and state coincide. In this situation, a cultural-psychological nation finds its political expression as a sovereign state. In a nation-state, political authority derives its legitimacy from the "people", and the people recognize the state as their own because it represents their collective identity.

Therefore, the nation-state is not merely an administrative structure, but an identity-based political system.

There are four essential elements of a state that plays a central role in the formation of a nation-state: population, territory, government, and sovereignty. Population forms the human base of the state; territory must be definite so that political authority can be exercised; government enforces rules and maintains order; and sovereignty gives the state internal and external independence.

Modern nation-states emerged when nationality and the state became aligned. Living under a common political framework develops unity among people, and wars, common struggles, and shared governance experiences strengthen national feelings. For this reason, many nationalities aspire to form states, and many existing states contain multiple nationalities, such as the former USSR or present-day multinational states.

Thus, the nation-state is a modern political arrangement where cultural unity and political authority work together. It is not simply a combination of territory and government, but an institutional form of a people's shared sense of belonging, unity, and sovereignty. It is through the nation-state that political order, citizenship, and collective identity are organized in the modern world.

Rogers Brubaker explains nation-state as "states of and for particular nations". This means that nation-states are such political arrangement where national identity and state sovereignty are closely connected and political authority is exercised in the name of nation.

For Ernest Renan, to understand the nation-state, it is first necessary to understand a nation. According to him, a nation is not a natural or biological entity, but a moral and spiritual community based on shared past memories and a collective will to live together in the present. When such a community gives political form to its common life and ensures its continuity through self-rule, the idea of the nation-state emerges. In this sense, the nation-state is not just a territory or a government, but a political expression of consent, sacrifice, and collective will.

Max Weber's definition of state is foundational to understanding the nation-state. According to Weber, a state is a political organization that exercises monopoly authority over the legitimate use of force within its defined territory. When this sovereign authority is exercised in the name of a national community, the state takes the form of a nation-state. In this perspective, the core element of the nation-state is sovereignty and political control, which is considered legitimate in the name of the nation.

J.W Garner defines the nation-state in institutional terms. According to him, a nation-state is a state where the population shares a common language, culture, history, and traditions and is politically organized under a sovereign government. In this definition, both cultural unity and political organization are equally important. Therefore, in Garner's view, the nation-state is the concrete form of overlap between nation and state.

Therefore, the nation-state cannot be understood simply as a legal or administrative unit. It is a political structure where shared identity (Renan), sovereign authority (Weber), and cultural-political unity (Garner) work together.

The nation and the nation-state are often considered synonymous, but in political science and modern history, there are conceptual and functional differences between the two. Understanding these terms separately is crucial to understanding nationalism and the modern state system. First of all, a nation is a cultural and psychological concept. A nation is a group of people who feel a sense of unity, belonging, and a common identity among themselves. This unity develops through common history, culture, language, traditions, shared memories, and collective experiences. A nation's existence does not depend on physical boundaries or political power; rather, it exists in the minds and consciousness of its people.

In contrast, a nation-state is a political organization. A nation-state exists when a nation finds its political expression as a sovereign state. In this, the terms cultural nation and political state coincide with each other. A nation-state has a definite territory, organized government, population, and sovereignty through which it exercises political authority. Another important difference is that a nation is subjective, while a nation-state is objective and institutional. A nation is a sentiment-people consider themselves part of a community. A nation-state is a formal structure that exercises laws, administration, government, and coercive power. A state has the right to demand obedience from its people, which a nation does not. Thirdly, a nation can exist without a state, but a nation-state is not possible without a state. History offers numerous examples of nationalities or nations that have existed without their own state. Jews before the creation of Israel, and Poles before 1919, had strong national identities without their own territories. But sovereignty and territory are essential elements of a nation-state. The fourth difference relates to political authority. A nation does not necessarily have political power, whereas in a nation-state, political authority and sovereignty play a central role. A nation-state exercises supreme power within its territory and is free from external control. Therefore, India was a nation before 1947, but not a nation-state without sovereignty.

Scholars believe that the nation and state are not always the same thing. In reality, very few countries are true nation-states. Most modern states are multinational, where different ethnic, linguistic, or cultural groups coexist. Therefore, there is not always a perfect match between state boundaries and national identity. In this context, the concepts of nationalism and the nation-state become quite complex, especially in post-colonial societies.

1.5 DEFINING NATIONALISM

Nationalism is a conceptual framework through which people understand their collective identity, belonging, and political destiny. In this process, populations cease to be simply groups of people but are seen as self-conscious political communities. Nationalism gives meaning to political authority and sovereignty through shared identity and loyalty, and legitimates this authority in the name of the nation. Thus, nationalism transforms abstract populations into meaningful and organized political communities.

Nationalism is a modern historical phenomenon that has emerged in different parts of the world primarily since the end of eighteenth century. Nationalism is more than a political ideology. Nationalism acts as a conceptual lens through which political authority, belonging, and collective destiny can be interpreted. It gives meaning to shared identity and sovereignty by transforming abstract populations into self-conscious political communities. It is a global historical process in which people come to understand their collective identity through the concept of "nation".

Understanding nationalism requires understanding multiple definitions of "nation". Some nations are defined on the basis of civic sense where nation's base is the citizens (*demos*) and the state plays a central role. In this model, citizenship and political participation are more important than ethnicity or culture. In contrast, some nations are understood in ethnic or cultural terms, where common language, culture, and shared ancestry are considered the basis of nationhood. In such cases, nation and state are not the same, such as the Kurds or Catalans, who are identified as "state-seeking nations". These two models show that the concept of nationalism does not operates in a single form, but is shaped by historical, social and cultural context.

It is true that early forms of nationalism developed in Europe, the nationalist ideas did not remain confined to Europe. Through industrialization, print culture, wars, and imperial expansion, nationalism became a global force, spreading to Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Nationalism in each region developed according to local historical conditions, but its core idea- linking political legitimacy to "nation"- remained common. Despite regional differences, nationalism everywhere linked political legitimacy to the idea of "nation", and replaced older sources of authority such as dynasty or religion.
Therefore, understanding nationalism is central to understanding modern history, as nation-states, political movements, and collective identities have been shaped through this process. For this reason, nationalism became one of the most powerful organizing principles of the modern world.

Nationalism creates a shared identity among people, where individuals see themselves as part of a larger community. This identity develops through common history, culture, language, symbols, and traditions. Some of the important characteristics of nationalism are as follows:

1. Sense of Collective Identity: Nationalism creates a shared identity among people, in which individuals see themselves as part of a larger community. This identity develops through common history, culture, language, symbols, and traditions.
2. Supreme loyalty to the Nation: A fundamental characteristic of nationalism is that an individual's greatest loyalty is to the nation, transcending religion, caste and region. According to Hans Kohn, this loyalty takes the form of a "state of mind".
3. Demand for Political Sovereignty: Nationalism holds that a nation should be its own state. Under this ideology, political power is legitimated in the name of the nation, leading to demands for self-determination and independence.
4. Congruence of Nation and State: An important feature of nationalism is that political boundaries and cultural boundaries must match. According to Ernest

Gellner, nationalism holds the principle that the national unit and the political unit are one and the same.

5. Role of Shared History and Memory: Nationalism emphasizes a shared past, historical memories, and common struggles. By highlighting heroes, golden ages, and collective sacrifices, people develop emotional attachment.

Nationalism therefore is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that combines identity, power, culture, and politics. It is a central concept for understanding modern history, as nation-states and political movements have been shaped by this ideology.

Earnest Gellner (1983) considers nationalism a political principle where "the political and national unit should be congruent". His definition emphasizes nationalism as a modern-day political principle that aligns cultural boundaries with political authority. According to him, nationalism primarily emerge in industrial societies where standardized education system and culture become important for social mobility and economic efficiency.

According to Eric Hobsbawn, nationalism is an ideology which believes that the political unit (state) and the national unit (nation) should be same. He believes that nations are not ancient or natural but they are modern times' construct. Hobsbawn explains that nationalism comes first, and then nations are formed. Ruling elites and state institutions create "invented traditions" through flags, national anthems, festivals, education, and history to develop loyalty and unity among the people. He views nationalism largely "from above" (through the state and elites), but believes it should also be understood "from below", where people accept it.

According to Anthony D. Smith, nationalism is an ideological movement that seeks to achieve autonomy, unity, and identity for a population that people see as a "nation".

Smith argues that nations are not merely modern political creations. They have their roots in pre-modern ethnic communities. To form a nation, it is necessary to have shared myths, historical memories, common culture, economy and territory among the people. That is why Smith's approach is ethno-symbolist- he considers culture, symbols and past traditions as an important basis of nationalism.

Kedourie (1993) views nationalism as an ideology and critically examines nationalism's theoretical claims. He challenges the cultural and ethnic arguments associated with the German romantic tradition, questioning their validity. Kedourie argues that the claim underlying nationalism-that nations are based on long established and natural ethnic identities-has been questioned and debunked by a number of scholars in different ways.

According to Hans Kohn, nationalism is a "state of mind" in which an individual's greatest loyalty is to the nation-state. Kohn says that with the rise of nationalism, people's loyalty shifted from the church, king or feudal lord to the nation. He described two forms of nationalism:

I. Western/ Civic Nationalism- based on political values, constitutions and citizenship.
II. Eastern / Ethnic Nationalism- based on shared culture, language, traditions and ancestry.

'Patriotism' and 'nationalism' are often mistaken for one another, but they are two different feelings. Patriotism at its core is a natural personal feeling of love for one's country-an attachment to one's land, one's people, and one's traditions. This is a sensible and limited love that does not consider other nations inferior. Nationalism, as distinct from this, is a political theory that says that the boundaries of "nation" and "state" should coincide.

American historian Carlton J.H. Hayes has explored this difference deeply in his influential work *Essays on Nationalism*(1926). Hayes has identified several forms of nationalism- humanitarian nationalism, Jacobin nationalism, traditional nationalism, liberal nationalism, integral nationalism, and economic nationalism. According to him, patriotism is a natural and noble sentiment that involves sympathy with others, while extreme or "integral" nationalism becomes a narrow, intolerant, and often aggressive ideology that holds one's nation supreme and views others with deep hatred.
Hayes has also argued that modern nationalism began to function like a religion- with its own beliefs, festivals, symbols, and "converts". It became a new quasi religion in a secular world. From this perspective, the fascism and ultra-nationalism that emerged in Europe during the 1930s seemed to Hayes to be a distortion of patriotism- a dangerously deviant ideology.

In another pamphlet *Patriotism, Nationalism and the Brotherhood of Man* (1937), Hayes introduced another important distinction: "Love of country" in patriotism is not merely attachment to one's land, but a "triple affection"- to place, to people, and to ideology. But this love is true only as long as it respects the rights of others. When this love turns into hatred towards others, it becomes a perverse form of nationalism.

The growth of nationalism has been closely linked with the political, economic, and social transformations of the modern world. Scholars argue that nationalism emerged as a powerful ideology from the end of the eighteenth century, when the source of political authority shifted from monarchy or religion to the "nation". After the French Revolution, sovereignty was associated with the people, giving nationalism a democratic and mobilizing force.

The significance of nationalism also lies in the fact that it was not confined to Europe. Through colonial expansion and global interactions, nationalist ideas reached Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In these regions, nationalism provided a framework for resistance and political organization against colonial domination. According to Eric Storm, nationalism in non-European societies did not mechanically copy European models but developed its own distinct forms by interacting with local histories, social structures, and colonial experiences.

Therefore, understanding nationalism is central to understanding the modern world. Concepts such as the formation of nation-states, citizenship, political rights, and collective identity were articulated through nationalism. At the same time, nationalism

gave rise to unity and self-determination, as well as exclusion and conflict. This dual character has made nationalism a powerful and complex force in modern history.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we understood the basic concepts of nation, nation-state, and nationalism. Nation was explained as a cultural and psychological community where people feel unity and belonging through common history, language, culture, and shared experiences. Nation-state was considered the political expression of nation, where cultural identity and political authority coincide within a sovereign state. This unit also clearly explained the conceptual differences between nation and nation-state. Further, nationalism was understood as a conceptual framework through which collective identity, political legitimacy, and sovereignty find meaning. Nationalism has shaped the formation of nation-states, political movements, and collective identities in the modern world. Thus, this unit provides a strong theoretical base for understanding modern politics and history.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is the most essential element of a nation-state?
2. Fill in the blanks:
   a) Nation-state is a _____ political entity where supreme authority is exercised.
   b) A state in which more than one national group lives is called a _____ state.

3. What does nationalism make of abstract populations?

4. Fill in the blanks:

a) Nationalism is a conceptual framework through which populations begin to understand themselves as _____ political communities

1.7 FURTHER READINGS

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Sovereignty

Ans to Q No 2: *a)* sovereign, *b)* multinational

Ans to Q No 3: Meaningful political communities
Ans to Q No 4: *a)* self-conscious *b)* nation *c)* political

1.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Why nation is called a cultural and psychological concept?
2. Explain the meaning of Nation-State.
3. Explain the concept of Nationalism.
4. Discuss the meaning of nation.
5. How does nationalism imply political authority and sovereignty?
6. Explain the relationship between Nationalism and Nation-State.
7. Critically analyze the definition and characteristics of nationalism.

UNIT 2: NATION AS A CONCEPT

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1. Learning Objectives
2.2. Introduction
2.3. Sources
2.4. Approaches
2.5. Debates
2.6. Let Us Sum Up
2.7. Further Reading
2.8. Answers to Check Your Progress
2.9. Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this chapter, you will be able to learn :

- explain the discourses around the concept of 'nation' (and nationalism)
- discuss the various approaches in which social thinkers and scholars have defined the concept
- discuss the various debates and theoretical contestations around the concept

2.2 Introduction

Throughout the course of human history, humans have organised themselves into various groups or social formations. From the prehistoric cave communities to tribal kinship societies and agricultural communities, humans have forged groups that distinctively form a basis of social, political and economic life. This relationship of belonging to a particular social formation is what forges the sense of a community. This social formation is also a marker to distinguish an 'us' from 'them' i.e. it delineates the limits of who is inside and a member of a community in contrast to who isn't.

Nation, too, is one such form of socio-political formation. A nation can be defined as a territorially bounded community, which is a historically evolving entity with a territorial structure of cultural similarity. Modern societies are marked by the growth of industry, money currency, trade and commerce, liberal values and increasing mobility of goods and people. What makes 'nation' as a modern form of community distinct from ethnic and tribal or city-state based social communities is both its vast territorial expanse as well as a relatively contiguous uniform culture that develops over time. Nationalism, however, is a set of beliefs about a nation. It can vary how the members of a nation set what parameters (political, religious, linguistic etc) would be the defining features of their nation. As such there can be civic nationalism where rule of law is the

basis of nationalism as well as other forms of nationalism like religious nationalism or linguistic nationalism. Nation, therefore, is the entity and nationalism the ideology that enforces the legitimacy and admission into the national entity. It is a dynamic and complex concept of political community and is distinguished from that of the state, which constitutes the bureaucratic and official arms of governance.

In this discussion on 'nation' as a concept, we have come across several similar terminologies (national, nationalism, bounded, territory, kinship) and phrases ('modern/modernity,' 'homogeneous/heterogeneous,' 'political community' etc.) which form an essential part of a theoretical discussion of this theme. It is important to note that in the study of social and political theory and concepts, these terminologies are often interlinked, where one concept adds a dimension and informs the other. They are not necessarily synonyms or substitutes, but have a distinctive point of focus on one aspect of the larger concept. Social concepts are not 'fixed' like concepts in natural sciences such as physics or chemistry; for example, Hydrogen is defined by its characteristics and properties and is universally accepted and verified. Nation, or nationalism – being a social and political concept – does have some basic defining characteristics, i.e. a form of political formation or an ideology that defines a community, but its usage and meanings can vary from one usage to another, i.e. it can be used both in fixed or loose ways, or in specific and broad ways.

This makes social and political concepts a complex maze, and it is important that we assess their complexity beyond their lexical or dictionary meanings. For example, when it is discussed that 'according to Benedict Anderson, nationalism is a modern political formation' – it is very essential that one looks at the keywords, i.e. 'nation' and 'modern.' Both of these terms contain not one but a layered set of meanings. 'Nation,' as we have discussed, means 'a group of people' (for example, the French nation) as well as 'a unit of political formation' (France, the nation-state). Nationalism, in extension, refers to the ideology that defines this particular political formation. Similarly, the word 'modern,' that Benedict Anderson emphasizes in relation to defining nationalism, is a term that has a layered set of meanings. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'modern' both in its noun and its adjective forms, and each of them has more than six to seven sets of meanings. The term 'modern' is popularly defined as 'something that exists in the present,' along with its opposition to 'ancient' or 'traditional.' In each of these definitions, one finds a newer set of words (ancient, traditional, present, contemporary etc.), and it is evident that though they are not synonyms of each other, they co-constitute meanings to 'modern' as a term. Benedict Anderson's definition of 'nation,' therefore, sets a direct relation between 'nation/nationalism' and the 'modern' – which, as Anderson explains in his book *Imagined Communities* (1983), is signified by the emergence of print capitalism, standardisation of languages, formation of school curriculums, and a renewed usage of historical symbols, to name a few. This provides the concept of 'nationalism' a temporal and constructive character: it is not a political ideology that has existed throughout all of human history, but a phenomenon that is a result of a set of social, economic, and cultural practices, interlinked with each other.

2.3 Sources

The idea of the nation as a category helps us understand that a nation is not simply a physical territory or a group of people living together, but a way of classifying and imagining collective belonging. In political science, the nation is treated as a social and political category that organizes identity, loyalty, and power.

Benedict Anderson explains that nations are “imagined communities,” meaning that members of a nation imagine a sense of shared belonging even though they will never meet most fellow members. This imagination is made possible through common language, education, symbols, and media. From this perspective, the nation exists not because of face-to-face relations, but because people believe they are part of a larger collective. Treating the nation as a category allows us to see that national identity is constructed, not natural or given. It is produced through stories of shared history, maps, flags, and rituals. These shared references help individuals place themselves within a national framework, shaping how they understand who belongs, who does not, and why the nation deserves political loyalty.

From a modernist viewpoint, especially in the work of Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), the nation as a category is closely linked to modern social and economic change. Gellner argues that nations emerge with industrial society, which requires a standardized culture, common language, and mass education. The state plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining this category by promoting uniform schooling, official languages, and national histories. In this sense, the nation becomes a way of classifying people so that society functions smoothly within a modern economy. Moreover, Gellner’s theory is the distinction between agrarian (pre-modern) society and industrial (modern) society. In agrarian societies, culture is highly stratified and localised. Elites possess a “high culture” based on literacy and religion, while the masses live within diverse local traditions and dialects. Political power does not require cultural homogeneity, and therefore there is no need for a unified national culture. Loyalty is directed toward dynasties, empires, or religious authorities rather than toward nations. In such societies, the category of the nation has little relevance.Industrial society, however, radically alters this situation. Modern economies require constant mobility, complex division of labour, and standardised communication. For these processes to function smoothly, individuals must share a common language, educational background, and cultural codes. According to Gellner, this requirement generates the demand for a homogeneous “high culture” that can be universally accessed. The state, through mass education and bureaucratic administration, becomes the key agent in producing and maintaining this shared culture. It is at this point that the nation emerges as a meaningful social category.

Anthony D. Smith, in his work, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations (1986)* adds an important layer by showing that while the nation is modern, it often draws upon older cultural resources such as myths, memories, and symbols. These elements give emotional depth to the category of the nation, making it feel ancient and natural even when it is historically recent. Thus, the nation as a category is both institutional and cultural: it is supported by state structures while also rooted in shared meanings that connect individuals to a collective past. Smith’s central critique is directed at modernist

theorists such as Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, who argue that nations are purely products of modernity, industrialisation, and state institutions. Smith insists that nation-state cannot be understood without reference to older ethnic formations, which he calls "ethnies." An *ethnie* is a named human population with shared myths of ancestry, collective memories, cultural elements, attachment to a homeland, and a sense of solidarity. These ethnies, according to Smith, existed long before modern nation-states and provide the cultural raw material for nationalism.In this sense, Smith's approach retains a primordial dimension. He argues that emotional attachments to ethnicity such as kinship, homeland, and shared past are deeply rooted and enduring, not easily invented or imposed by the modern state. National identities succeed when they resonate with these older cultural ties. Unlike strict primordialists, however, Smith does not claim that nations are biologically fixed or timeless. Instead, he emphasises historical continuity, arguing that modern nations are reconfigurations of pre-existing ethnic identities, rather than entirely new creations.

In the case of India, the anticolonial struggle against British rule is also termed as a 'nationalist or freedom struggle.' Two of the most prominent streams of thought in these lines, with divergent approaches to the question of nationalism, were those shared by Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Gandhi was a staunch critic of European modernity and in his 1909 book "*Hind Swaraj,*" he redefined nationalism for the Indian context. His nationalism was not built on the foundation of the 'self-other' binary that formed the core of nationalism in the West, but was pluralist in character standing with its fundamental character being shaped with the ethos of India's folk traditions. Tagore, on the other hand, shared a different vision than that of Gandhi. While he acknowledged India's sovereign right to govern itself, he offered a scathing critique of the idea of nationalism itself, deeming it morally "illegitimate". He made an analogy of nationalism with a dam that constricts the natural flow of the perennial river of humanity. He rejected the idea as being against India's civilisational values that always strived for the uplift of the larger humanity. While disagreeing with Gandhi on the question of science and modernity, he argued for a creative interaction between the East and the West.

• Nationalist Trajectories in a Global World: Perspectives from Asia, Africa and Latin America and Europe

i) National Trajectories in Asia

Nationalism in Asia arose as a result of various histories, ranging from anti-colonial struggles to cultural revival and nation-building efforts. Asia has remained one of the world's most complex geographies when it comes to elementary forms of modern politics. From constitutional to authoritarian forms of power, from linguistic to ethnic and religious forms of socio-political formations, Asia's modern trajectory is a tapestry of nationalisms. In modern China, nationalism came together with communism and Mao Zedong's 'Cultural Revolution' which weaved together a convergence of a peasant-centric economic system with a distinct form of cultural cohesion. In South Asia, although India and Pakistan had the same initial roots of nationalism in anti-colonial

struggle, their paths diverged. While nationalism in India emerged as a pluralist and secular path with a Constitution-centric civic-nationalism, Pakistan witnessed a religious re-ordering of its nationalism by constituting itself into an Islamic republic. Nationalism in Bangladesh was driven by language i.e. Urdu-speaking West Pakistani political elite's dominance over Bengali-dominated East Pakistan including the economic subjugation that the eastern portion experienced at the hands of the same elites. Sri Lanka witnessed a specific form of religious nationalism as it soon witnessed the rise of Sinhala majoritarianism and a series of ethnic tensions between Buddhist Sinhala population and non-Buddhist formations, of which the Sri Lankan Tamils are a significant example. Japan's nationalism was derived from its imperial culture and samurai ethics, which underwent change during the process of modernization into a strong modern nationalism associated with industrialism and militarism.

1. Africa: Paths to Nationalism

The nationalisms in Africa were mostly shaped around the struggles against colonialism, racism, and imperialism, although the path to nationalism varied in different regions. In Ghana, nationalism took shape as a powerful anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic movement, and political independence went hand-in-hand with Pan-African unity and decolonization, as seen in the movements spearheaded by Kwame Nkrumah who led Ghana to independence. The nationalism in Algeria was largely influenced by its history of conflict against French colonial powers. Frantz Fanon's works – '*Black Skin, White Masks'* (1952) and '*Wretched of the Earth*' (1961) examined the theme of violence, racial alienation, and revolution, explaining how nationalism can act as a means of recapturing collective pride and power as well as in diagnosing power in a racialised post-colonial world. In the case of South Africa, nationalism was shaped by its experience of settler colonialism and apartheid, in which racism dictated politics and social relations. The anti-apartheid movements by groups like the African National Congress were based on nationalism coupled with democracy and racial equality.

2. Nationalist Movements of Europe

The European concept of nationalism was born during the revolutions, state creation processes, and debates on issues of identity and sovereignty. The nationalist movement in France was strongly influenced by the historic French revolution which converted the people as subjects under the ancient regime into "free citizens" of a republic, and the connection between nationalism and secularism, republicanism, popular sovereignty, and the expression of national identity in the notion of "*Vive la France*." On the other hand, nationalism in Germany evolved through cultural solidarity and ethnic affinity, which witnessed an extreme form of 'Nazi-ism' refied through Adolf Hitler's reign which included brutal excommunication of non-German races like the Jews. Such forms of racial and ultra-nationalist projects were explored in relation to totalitarianism by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Another extremist manifestation of nationalism occurred in Italy under Benito Mussolini where fascism combined militarism, populism, and glorification of the nation-state. In Eastern Europe, nationalism was characterized by resistance against Russian domination following the creation of the Soviet Union, based on different national, ethnic, and cultural identities.

The fall of the USSR in 1991-92 witnessed the birth of several new East European nations, each tailored to specific language and ethnic-traditions.

3. Latin America: Nationalist Trajectories

Nationalism in Latin America preceded that in Asia and Africa, with the majority of countries gaining their independence during the nineteenth century as a result of their independence from Spanish and Portuguese colonialism. Latin American nationalisms were different from subsequent anti-colonial efforts in that they were largely headed by the Creole population of colonial territories. Nationalism in Brazil, for instance, took the form of Creole nationalism, wherein Creole leaders attempted to gain independence by retaining the existing social hierarchy. Latin American nationalism was marked by complicated racial mixes, incorporating both Indigenous peoples, Africans, and Europeans, and was therefore formed in the context of colonial history. The post-World War II era in Latin America saw the struggle against economic dependency on other countries, with the US playing an important role as far as resource extraction and foreign domination of capital is concerned. Populism as a socialist project emerged across countries like Peru, Bolivia, Cuba and Argentina. Nationalist movements also made a connection between sovereignty and control of land and natural resources.

2.4 APPROACHES

Nation as a 'Modern' Political Category

Benedict Anderson's concept of the "imagined community", articulated in his seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (1983)*, offers a groundbreaking understanding of the modern nation. Anderson argues that a nation is not a natural or eternal entity but a culturally constructed community, the possibility of which emerged under specific historical conditions. People of even the smallest of nations have never known most of their fellow members but they imagine a deep horizontal camaraderie. Further, he emphasises the nation to be limited with distinct boundaries and sovereign, their emergence following the loss of the legitimacy of monarchs ruling under the notion of divine authority.

Three foundational ideas shaped the pre-modern communities. Firstly, a particular script-language (like Latin) offered privileged access to ontological truth (what is it to be), making it possible for vast transcontinental communities such as Christendom and Islamic Ummah. Secondly, the idea of a society organised under the central hierarchical authority of the monarch who ruled with cosmological (divine) dispensation. Thirdly, a conception of time where cosmology and history were conflated to make the origins of the world and men synonymous. Combined together, these gave men a moral certainty placing meanings on the arbitrary events of suffering, death and servitude. With the decline of these conditions under the material conditions of modernity, the search was on for a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together. With the emergence of what he terms "print capitalism", the notion of the nation emerged to serve that very purpose. It refers to the mass

production of books, particularly novels, newspapers, and pamphlets in vernacular languages.

Novels depicted individual characters sharing, experiencing and acting distinctly but within a homogeneous temporal plane. It enabled the readers to imagine reality unfolding in parallel, with the emergence of the notion of an empty, homogeneous time. It was the same as the experience of a nation, where people without even meeting each other in person imagined sharing a common temporal horizon. The newspapers that Anderson terms as "one day bestsellers" reinforced this idea of simultaneity and commonality across an empty time in both its function and form. The ritual of reading the same newspaper in a specific time of the day across gave a sense of simultaneity across time. It was also profoundly reflected in the very format of the newspaper where simultaneous events across space but happening simultaneously are arranged in an empty homogeneity. Anderson's perspective is unique in that he does not reduce nationalism to economic necessity (as Gellner does) or to ethnic continuity (as Smith does). Instead, Anderson focuses on forms of consciousness and the 'bounded' nature of community-feeling that nationalism is. He analyses how people come to experience time, space, and belonging in a distinctly modern way. For Anderson, the nation is imagined not because it is false, but because its members will never know most of their fellow-members, yet still feel a deep sense of communion with them.

As the preceding sections have shown, nationalism is a modern political ideology, shaped by structural transformations (Gellner), historical-cultural continuities (Smith), and forms of imagination and communication (Anderson). Yet, despite repeated claims about its decline in an age of globalisation, nationalism continues to exert a powerful and often unsettling influence on contemporary politics. It is in this sense that nationalism appears as a *spectre* (which means a ghost) which continues to be alive and one that refuses to disappear and constantly reconfigures itself. Benedict Anderson develops his theorisation of the concept in his following book *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (1998).

In the contemporary period, nationalism has re-emerged in response to economic insecurity, global integration, and perceived loss of political control. As states confront the pressures of global markets, migration, and supranational governance, nationalist rhetoric promises certainty, cultural authenticity, and restored sovereignty. This revival often operates through simplified binaries of "us" and "them," turning social and economic anxieties into cultural conflicts. The spectre is thus not merely emotional but deeply political. What makes nationalism particularly resilient is its capacity to combine democratic language with authoritarian practices. It can invoke popular will while narrowing the definition of who belongs to the nation.

• Post-colonial Critique of (Western) Theories of Nationalism

Partha Chatterjee's critique of Benedict Anderson's idea of imagined communities is one of the most influential postcolonial interventions in nationalism studies. With Anderson's 'Imagined Community ' revitalising the debate on nationalism, Chatterjee's book '*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative*

Discourse?' published in 1986, offered a substantive critique, debunking many of the liberal presumptions. The other key contribution of Chatterjee in the debate was his book '*Nation and its Fragments*' (1993) where he deals with many other themes linked to nationalism in the colonised world, including questions like nationalism and the question of women and the question of community and civil society.

While acknowledging the analytical strength of Anderson's framework, he asks a critical question with regard to Anderson's treatment of nationalism as a modular form originating in Europe and the Americas, then replicated elsewhere. He asks, "If nationalism in the rest of the world has to choose their imagined community from certain modular forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" This treatment of nationalism in Asia, Africa and Latin America as belated imitations of European models, differing only in content but not in form robs colonized peoples of historical agency and intellectual creativity.

Rejecting the conventional understanding of nationalism in the colonised world as a political movement, he argues that "anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty much before it begins its political battle with the imperial power." For this purpose, Chatterjee introduces a crucial distinction between the material and spiritual domains of nationalism. The former consisting of state institutions, economy, science, and bureaucracy, was dominated by Western modernity. However, nationalists carved out an autonomous inner or spiritual domain, encompassing culture, religion, language, family, and moral life, which they claimed as authentically national and beyond colonial control. It was within this inner domain that anti-colonial nationalism first emerged, long before the achievement of political sovereignty.

Chatterjee also criticizes Anderson's notion of empty homogenous time, which he terms as the "utopian time of capital", arguing that colonial societies experienced time differently. "Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense," that did not align with linear, secular temporality but was shaped by layered histories, civilizational pasts, and unequal modernities. He insists that nationalism in the colonial world followed a distinct historical trajectory, one that cannot be understood merely as a derivation of the European experience. His critique thus re-centers postcolonial differences and challenges universalist theories of nationalism.

2.5 DEBATES

i) Eastern vs Western Nationalism

One influential way of understanding nationalism is the distinction between Western and Eastern nationalism, articulated by Hans Kohn in The Idea of Nationalism (1944). Kohn argued that nationalism developed along two historical paths shaped by different political and social contexts. Western nationalism emerged in countries like England, France, and the United States, where stable political institutions existed before nationalism. It developed alongside liberalism, constitutionalism, and individual rights, with nationhood based on citizenship and shared political values. The American Revolution and French Revolution exemplify this civic model.

Eastern nationalism, associated with Eastern Europe and parts of Asia, emerged under imperial domination and delayed state formation. Here nationalism began as a cultural movement before the creation of a sovereign state, defining the nation through language, religion, ethnicity, and shared history. Kohn viewed this form as more exclusive and authoritarian, famously contrasting "good" Western nationalism with "bad" Eastern nationalism. However, later scholars criticised this distinction as simplistic and Eurocentric, noting that Western nationalism also produced colonialism and racism, while Eastern nationalism often functioned as anti-colonial resistance.

John Plamenatz in Two Types of Nationalism (1976) reworked Kohn's distinction without its moral hierarchy. He argued that Western nationalism was largely affirmative, while nationalism in Eastern Europe and the colonial world was reactive and imitative, resisting domination while asserting local identity. Thus, nationalism in Asia and Africa can be understood as a response to colonialism rather than a deviation from the Western model.

ii) Nation-state vs State-nation

Alfred Stepan, Juan J. Linz, and Yogendra Yadav in *Crafting State-Nations: India and Other Multinational Democracies* (2011) proposed the idea of the "state-nation." In countries like India and the United States, multiple nationalities coexist, making overlap between state and nation impossible. Democracy survives not by erasing differences but through federalism, minority rights, and flexible constitutional arrangements. Attempts to impose a singular national identity risk destabilising democratic unity.

iii) Multiculturalism vs Nationalism vs Globalisation

In the contemporary world, nationalism operates within conditions shaped by globalisation and multiculturalism, both of which challenge the idea of a culturally homogeneous nation. Migration, global markets, and transnational communication have weakened the exclusive sovereignty of the nation-state. For many, this produces insecurity, leading to renewed nationalist appeals promising cultural authenticity and stronger borders. Arjun Appadurai in Fear of Small Numbers (2006) argues that nationalism often emerges as a response to anxieties produced by globalisation.

LET US KNOW:

'*Nation-state and People-nation':* In the context of India, Partha Chatterjee forwards an important theoretical contrast in the discussion on 'nationalism' i.e. that beyond the distinction of the *nation* and *state*, there is the need for a different category called "people-nation". He uses this term to refer to the distinct imaginations of nationalism that emerged with the introduction of print culture in the various vernacular languages of India and their subsequent standardization. While the state claims the legitimacy of a single Indian nation, the latter manifests itself in multiple streams among the people. The political history of independent India, in his analysis, remains a strife of the nation-state to align itself with the demands of the people -nation.

To summarise, it is very important to approach and assess social and political concepts like 'nation' in their layered and complex characteristics. Such concepts might not have a singular, fixed definition. It is the very nature of how dynamic 'society' or 'politics' is that makes these concepts complex ideas. Political theory, as an intellectual practice, is about understanding the complex nature of these concepts: how they have come to be used, what their old and new meanings are, how they are used and shaped by different actors, and how their meanings change across time and space.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this text, you have learnt:

- Nation is a form of social formation and a distinct political community which is territorially bounded and culturally uniform.
- Nationalism is a set of beliefs towards the entity that is the nation.
- There can be numerous types of nationalism, notably civic nationalism, ethnic nationalism, religious nationalism, linguistic nationalism to name a few.
- The concept of nation is dynamic and complex. It has a temporal character to it as it is develops and alters over time.
- Benedict Anderson defines nation as an 'imagined community' which is bounded by territory. Nation, for Anderson, is a distinctively modern phenomenon.
- Ernest Gellner theorises nations also as a modern phenomenon, symbolised by industrial capitalism and the presence of a 'high, hogomenous culture.'
- Tagore's essays on nationalism provide us a critique of the idea of nation in the early 20th century which was marked by European colonial domination.
- There are several debates around various theorisations of nationalisms of which the eastern vs western nation-state vs state-nation, and multiculturalism vs nationalism are significant notes.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS:

1) What phrase did Benedict Anderson popularise in his definition of a nation?
2) Who uses the term "homogenous, high culture' in his definition for nationalism?
3) Which Indian thinker considers nationalism as "morally illegitimate"?
4) Who wrote the book "*Ethnic Origins of Nations*"?
5) Who wrote the book "*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism"*?
6) What is the phrase that Chatterjee uses to critique Anderson's notion of empty homogenous time?
7) Who wrote the book "*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*
8) Which two revolutions for Hans Kohn are examples of the 'western' type?
9) In Stephan, Linz and Yadav's theorisation, what is called when the state formation precedes the formation of a nation?
10) 10) Which scholar explores the contradictions that gloablisation brings in the context of nationalism in their book, *A Fear of Small Numbers*?

2.7 FURTHER READING

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2.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Benedict Anderson popularised the phrase of 'imagined communities' in his definition of nation.
Ans to Q No 2: Ernest Gellner uses the concepts of 'homogenous, high culture' in the definition of a nation.
Ans to Q No 3: Rabindranath Tagore argued nationalism as a 'morally illegitimate' entity.
Ans to Q No 4: Anthony D. Smith is the author of "*Ethnic Origins of Nations.*"
Ans to Q No 5: Benedict Anderson wrote the book "*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism"*
Ans to Q No 6: Partha Chatterjee uses the phrase "utopian time of capital" to critique Anderson's notion of empty homogeneous time.
Ans to Q No 7: Partha Chatterjee wrote the book "*Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?"*
Ans to Q No 8: The American and the French revolutions are what Hans Kohn classifies as that of the 'western' type.
Ans to Q No 9: In Stephan, Linz and Yadav's theorisation, it is termed as 'state-nation; when the state formation precedes the formation of a nation.
Ans to Q No 10: Arjun Appadurai explores the contradictions that gloablisation brings in the context of nationalism in his book, *A Fear of Small Numbers.*

2.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1) Define how 'nation' is a social formation or a form of a community.
2) How does a nation mark its limits?
3) Name two Indian thinkers who had a critical conceptualisation of the 'nation' form.

4) Anderson explains the nation as an “imagined community.” Explain how Anderson substantiates this argument.
5) Explain Anthony D Smith’s emphasis on ‘ethnicity’ in his understanding of nationalism
6) Elucidate and briefly explain the post-colonial critique to the theorisation of nationalism by Partha Chatterjee.
7) Anderson’s understanding of nation is marked by a distinctive emphasis of it being a ‘modern’ political phenomenon. Elaborate in detail.
8) How does Hans Kohn distinguish between eastern and western nationalism? Do you agree with this distinction? High reasons for your agreement or disagreement.

UNIT 3: THEORIES OF NATIONALISM

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Primordialism

3.4 Modernism and Social Constructionism

3.5 Ethno-symbolism

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

3.7 Further Readings

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

3.9 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the major theories of nationalism ranging from viewing it as an ancient and natural attachment, to seeing it as a modern construct shaped by industrialization, communication, and political movements,
- discuss the idea of nationalism that has evolved and how it continues to shape modern politics.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

'Nationalism' is a spirit which forges an awareness among the members of a community about their unity and natural homogeneity and also creates a sense of superiority among them which allows the nation's frontiers to extend at the expense of its neighbours and other national communities and at the same time instigates them to drive out intruders whether foreign dynasties or imperial powers out of their own community. The people/community having such kind of spirit of nationalism are said to have belonging to a particular 'nation'.

There has been considerable debate over the origin of the ideas of *nation* and *nationalism*, leading to the development of various theoretical perspectives. These theories differ widely—some regard nationalism as an ancient and natural attachment, while others interpret it as a modern construct shaped by industrialization, communication, and political movements. Broadly, four major approaches are identified in explaining the origin of nationalism: primordialism, perennialism, modernism, and ethno-symbolism. Let us now examine each of these theories in turn.

3.3 PRIMORDIALISM

According to Sandra F. Joireman, if the study of the emergence of nations and nationalism is divided into *old* and *new* ideological approaches, then primordialism clearly belongs to the "old" camp, both rhetorically and theoretically. Primordialists argue that the modern idea of nationalism is essentially an evolved and politicized form of certain *primordial* or *primary* human ties that are fundamental to every society. In other words, they view the *nation* as natural in origin, since in their conception, nationalism arises out of some deep-rooted, primeval bonds of human association.

It was Jean-Jacques Rousseau who first articulated the idea of the such kind of origin of the *nation* and *nationalism*. His ideas were later reinforced by Abbé Sieyès during the French Revolution, when the notion of a French nation began to take shape. Subsequently, the Romantic writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—particularly the German Romantics—advanced an *organicist* view of nationalism. They portrayed nationalism as a natural sentiment, akin to primordial attachments rooted in ethnicity, race, language, and culture. Thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder and Johann Gottlieb Fichte emphasized the idea of the *German Volk*, thereby laying the intellectual foundations of a unified German identity based on a common language, culture, and historical consciousness.

Another strand within the primordialist school is represented by the socio-biologists, such as Pierre van den Berghe and Walker Connor. According to them, the *nation* is essentially an evolved form of primordial ties rooted in the idea of common ancestry. This ancestry may at times be mythical (for example, Indians tracing descent from Manu and Ira) or biologically established (as in the case of the Chinese, often described as belonging to the same Mongoloid race).

Walker Connor emphasizes that whether such blood relations are factually true or not is ultimately irrelevant—what matters is the shared *belief* in common descent. In other words, nations are viewed as products of deeply rooted, natural sentiments of belonging, similar to extended families. These bonds are sustained through the recognition of cultural "signs" of affinity or similarity, such as appearance, religion, or other shared markers.

Yet another category of primordialists is that of cultural primordialists, represented by scholars such as Clifford Geertz and Edward Shils. An anthropologist by training, Geertz argued that, unlike socio-biologists who stress biological descent, it is cultural traits—such as social practices, customs, language, and religion—that create a sense of natural unity among people. According to him, every individual is born into a particular culture that not only shapes beliefs and identity but also instils a perception of distinctiveness from other cultural groups. Consequently, even people of diverse biological origins may develop a shared cultural identity. Geertz maintained that this primordial attachment to culture often evolves into a sense of belonging to a nation. To underscore the primordial power of cultural ties, he noted that such identities can sometimes override civic identities (for instance, that of being a citizen of a state), producing clashes of identity—an occurrence commonly observed in multicultural nation-states.

A sub-category of cultural primordialism is linguistic primordialism. The leading proponent of this view, J.A. Laponce, argues that within culture it is language that holds primordial significance. In this perspective, nations are largely built upon linguistic identity, and multicultural conflicts within a nation are often expressions of underlying multilingual tensions. Laponce illustrates this with the case of Quebec (Canada), where cultural conflict is articulated through the competition between two dominant languages: English and French.

The most recent strand of primordialist thought is neo-primordialism, represented by Samuel Huntington. In the post–Cold War period, Huntington argued, national identities have been restructured, with nations increasingly perceiving themselves as part of broader international communities rooted in the primordial identity of civilization. He identified several contemporary civilizations, including the Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western, Latin American, and African. According to Huntington, this reconfiguration of identity explains why the United States has sought closer alignment with European countries and why scattered European nations have come together to form the European Union.

Criticism of Primordialist Approach

(i) The most fundamental criticism of the primordialist approach is that it fails to recognize nationalism or the nation as a distinct emotion or identity. Instead, it reduces nationalism to pre-existing primordial ties or emotions that have always existed in human societies. This interpretation is rejected by many scholars who regard nationalism as a modern phenomenon, unique in its conception and character, and fundamentally different from other forms of identity or emotion.

(ii) A significant criticism, particularly directed at the socio-biological strand of primordialism, is that genetic similarity does not necessarily translate into national unity. People belonging to the same race are often organized into different nations, while, conversely, racially diverse groups may coexist within a single nation—as seen in the cases of the United States and India.

(iii) Cultural primordialism is also subject to criticism, since there are examples of stable multicultural nations, such as the United States. Moreover, culture itself is fluid in modern societies, shaped by migration, economic expansion, and global interconnections. The blending of cultures is also common—for instance, in the U.S., the emergence of Afro-American culture alongside mainstream American culture illustrates such hybridity. The case of golfer Tiger Woods, who embodies an Asian–Afro-American heritage (with an Afro-American father and a Thai mother), further demonstrates cultural fusion. Yet, despite his mixed cultural background, his national identity is unequivocally American—highlighting the limits of cultural primordialism in explaining nationalism.

• PERENNIALISM

According to the perennialist paradigm, nations have always existed throughout history; they are considered perennial or immemorial, present across continents and historical periods. Unlike primordialists, who view nations and nationalism as modern,

politically evolved forms of primordial human ties, perennialist historians and social scientists argue that the idea of the nation and nationalism existed in a consolidated form even in the pre-modern world. A.D. Smith underscores this perspective by noting that, from a perennialist viewpoint, nations are simply recent expressions of an age-old tradition, with nothing fundamentally new about modern nations apart from the technologies and temporal contexts in which they emerged. Moreover, perennialist scholars emphasize the role of institutional practices—such as those of the church, state, and other enduring structures—in uniting people and shaping nations, rather than attributing nationhood primarily to primordial ties like culture, language, or ancestry.

Within the perennialist paradigm, two distinct strands can be identified: continuous perennialism and recurrent perennialism. Continuous perennialism, advanced by scholars such as Adrian Hastings, maintains that nations are immemorial, existing not only in their consolidated but also in their recognizable contemporary forms even in the pre-modern world. For Hastings, the critical issue is the *"date of commencement"* of the nation. In contrast to modernists, who consider the French Revolution as the decisive watershed in the emergence of nations and nationalism, Hastings argues that entities such as England and Ireland can trace their national origins back to the High Middle Ages. He further contends that peoples such as the Armenians, Ethiopians, Jews, and Persians displayed national consciousness even in antiquity. In this regard, Hastings reinforces Hugh Seton-Watson's distinction between the *"old continuous nations"* of Western and Northern Europe and the relatively *"new nations"* that emerged in Eastern Europe and Asia.

The second strand of perennialism, known as recurrent perennialism, focuses less on the antiquity of particular nations and more on the cyclical recurrence of nations as a general phenomenon. The leading exponent of this approach, John Armstrong, acknowledges that nations have always existed throughout history, but emphasizes that their forms and expressions have continually shifted over time. In Armstrong's view, nations and national sentiments do not remain static; rather, they emerge, grow, decline, and may even disappear for a period, only to re-emerge in altered forms in subsequent epochs. Thus, recurrent perennialism highlights the dynamic, cyclical pattern of nationhood, in contrast to the continuous existence of specific nations emphasized by continuous perennialism.

Criticism of Perennialist Approach

(i) One of the fundamental criticisms of the perennialist approach comes from modernists, who regard nation and nationalism as exclusively modern phenomena.

(ii) Criticizing the continuous perennialist strand, historians such as John Breuilly and Eric Hobsbawm argue that the vast socio-economic and political differences between the modern and pre-modern eras make it virtually impossible for any idea—whether nationalism or otherwise—to have persisted in the same form across ages.

(iii) Similarly, recurrent perennialist arguments have also faced criticism. Susan Reynolds, for instance, acknowledges that certain forms of collective ties did exist in pre-modern times which bore some resemblance to modern nations.

However, she prefers to describe these as ‘regnal ties’ rather than ‘national ties’, thereby distinguishing them from the modern idea of the nation.

Let us Know

The contention between primordialists/perennialists on the one hand and modernists on the other arises primarily from their differing conceptions of nationalism. Perennialists adopt a broader and looser definition of the nation, considering its existence even when only a small minority outside the ruling elite subscribes to the idea. In contrast, modernists argue that a nation can be said to exist only when nationalist sentiment is shared by the majority of the population, or the public at large. Consequently, modernists do not attribute national feeling to pre-modern empires, since the very notion of a ‘public’ could only emerge in modern times with the rise of concepts such as democracy and republicanism.

3.4 MODERNISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Unlike primordialists and perennialists—who trace the roots of nations and nationalism to the pre-modern world in some form—modernist scholars view them as essentially modern phenomena, both in conception and origin. These modernist writers acknowledge that two crucial preconditions of the nation-state already existed in earlier epochs: compact cultural units (based on tribe, caste, clan, village, or religion) and political units (ranging from small city-states and petty chieftaincies to large empires). Yet, they argue, neither of these formations was organized around the idea of a *nation* or *nationalism*.

In fact, in the pre-modern world, large political entities such as empires often encompassed multiple cultural units, while vast cultural units such as Islamic civilization or Christendom could exist across and within several political boundaries. The principle of *one culture – one history – one identity – one state – one nation* had not yet crystallized. It was only in nineteenth-century Europe that this idea acquired significance, spreading to other parts of the world mainly during the first half of the twentieth century.

Even within the modernist school, however, there is no consensus on what precisely changed in the modern age that enabled the rise of the nation and nationalism.To begin with, the German sociologist Max Weber emphasizes the role of bureaucracy and the intelligentsia as the chief carriers of the concept of nationalism. Unlike the German Romantics, who viewed the nation as an organic and natural construct, Weber understood nations as products of political motivation, emerging primarily to strengthen and consolidate the power of the state. In this process, a rationally organized bureaucracy and a committed body of intellectuals played a decisive role in articulating and advancing the idea of nationalism.

In contrast to Weber’s argument, Marxist writers provide a materialist interpretation of the rise of nations and nationalism. From the Marxist perspective, nationalism is essentially a construct of the bourgeoisie, devised to serve their class interests. It emerged as a means to create a unified national market—free from internal customs barriers and toll taxes—while being safeguarded through favorable tariffs,

such as high import duties on foreign manufactured goods and low export duties on indigenous products.

In this sense, Marxist thinkers regard nationalism as inseparable from the development of capitalism. Just as capitalism was seen as a necessary historical stage, so too was nationalism understood as a transitional phenomenon—a stepping stone toward socialism. Marxist writers do not, therefore, reject nationalism outright. Rather, they contend that it bears an unmistakable bourgeois bias and does not fundamentally serve the interests of the working class.

Situated within the Marxist framework, E.H. Carr in his book *Nationalism and After* (1945) traces the development of the idea of nation and nationalism through three distinct phases, each corresponding to a particular stage in the evolution of capitalism. The first of these is the phase of *monarchical nationalism*, evident in countries like France and England during the early modern epoch (16th–18th centuries), when national unity was embodied in the figure of the monarch. Carr associates this phase with the dominance of mercantilism as the prevailing capitalist idea, emphasizing economic policies centered on state control, protectionism, and the accumulation of wealth through trade.

The second phase, which Carr terms *democratic nationalism*, begins with the French Revolution and extends up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. This period was marked by the spread of industrialization and the ascendancy of *laissez-faire* principle (free trade). The third phase, *socialist nationalism*, emerged in the post-1914 context, when the entire population was mobilised for the rise of fully socialized nation-states. Here, the dominant concern was the redistribution of resources along socialist lines.

Carr's schema, however, is evidently Eurocentric. It fails to account for the experiences of nations that emerged outside Europe, especially in the post-World War II era, where struggles against colonialism and the pursuit of national liberation gave rise to very different trajectories of nationalism.

Moving to non-Marxist modernist perspectives, Hans Kohn distinguishes between two contrasting patterns in the rise of nations and nationalism in Europe. In Western Europe, nations developed more organically, shaped by liberalising tendencies and the gradual empowerment of the masses. By contrast, in Eastern Europe—particularly in regions beyond the Rhine—nations emerged largely as a response to the imperialist interventions of Western European powers. As a result, Kohn argues, nationalism in Eastern Europe was frequently intertwined with authoritarian regimes that curtailed individual rights under the pretext of serving national welfare. This sharp divergence can be seen most clearly in the liberal nationalism of England and France on the one hand, and the authoritarian, collectivist nationalism of Germany, Italy, and Russia on the other.

Anthony Giddens also examines nationalism in his two-volume work, where he defines it as a system of symbols and beliefs shared by members of a community, often shaped or promoted by elites, which fosters a sense of collective identity among regional, ethnic, or linguistic groups. He considers nationalism a distinctly modern phenomenon, emerging in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Although

nationalism developed alongside capitalism and the rise of the nation-state, Giddens cautions against reducing it to a mere by-product of either; instead, he treats it as a relatively autonomous force.

Giddens further argues that European nationalism cannot be universally applied without considering broader historical contexts, which he terms "world-time." While he rejects a purely economic explanation, he reintroduces a connection between capitalism and nationalism at the psychological level, suggesting that nationalism responds to individuals' need for stability and meaning in a world where the commodification of time and space has undermined their sense of ontological security. At the same time, he acknowledges that nationalism is linked to class power and domination, and that the uneven development of capitalism has significantly shaped the rise of oppositional nationalisms.

Another non-Marxist modernist theoretician, Elie Kedourie, conceptualises nationalism as a secular political form of *utopianism*, rooted in the idea of selective self-determination embodied in the nation-state. He provides an intellectual interpretation of its emergence, presenting nationalism as a *constructed idea* born out of the European Enlightenment and the Romantic movement.

According to Kedourie, nationalism as a doctrine was invented in early nineteenth-century Europe by alienated intellectuals who, despite the liberating ideals of Enlightenment and Romanticism, remained constrained under absolutist monarchies. By advancing the novel idea of nationalism, these intellectuals sought to redirect loyalty away from monarchs towards the nation-state, thereby carving out new opportunities for their own political and social inclusion within this emerging structure.

Extending his analysis to the colonial world, Kedourie describes the phenomenon as "diffusionist nationalism"—that is, nationalism as an imported idea transmitted from Europe. Here too, he underscores the pivotal role of intellectuals, arguing that nativethinkers, after engaging with European texts, adapted and propagated the idea of nationalism within their own societies.

While Kedourie's arguments are significant—since wherever nationalism emerges we do indeed find an intelligentsia promoting and articulating it—his interpretation remains limited. He overlooks the fact that, in the very process of importing the idea of nationalism, the concept itself underwent transformation. In colonial contexts, it was not a mere *imitation* of the Western model of nationalism, but rather a process of *constructive borrowing*, wherein native intellectuals reinterpreted and reshaped the idea to suit their own historical, cultural, and political realities.

Social Constructionism

Among modernist theoreticians, a specific school is that of proponents of social constructionism. They view nations and nationalism not as natural or given entities, but as socially created and reproduced phenomena. It emphasises that nations are not timeless or inevitable but are constructed through human interaction, discourse, institutions, and power relations. In this sense, nations are understood as "imagined" or "invented" communities whose boundaries, histories, and identities are shaped by social processes rather than by fixed primordial ties.

This perspective resonates strongly with theorists such as Benedict Anderson, who described nations as *"imagined communities"* made possible by the spread of print capitalism; Eric Hobsbawm, who analysed "invented traditions" as deliberate creations that give an aura of continuity to modern nations; and Ernest Gellner, who, though usually grouped as a modernist, also highlighted how industrial society required the cultural standardisation that created national identities.

In his classic book *Imagined Communities* (1983), Benedict Anderson argued that nations are not natural or primordial entities, but modern social constructs made possible by specific historical processes. For Anderson, the nation is *imagined* because its members will never know or meet most of their fellow citizens, yet they still experience a deep sense of communion and belonging. It is *limited* because every nation has boundaries beyond which other nations exist, and it is *sovereign* because it arose in a historical moment when divine authority and dynastic empires were being replaced by the ideal of the self-governing people.

A central pillar of Anderson's theory is the role of print capitalism. With the rise of the printing press, the mass production of books and newspapers in vernacular languages enabled people to imagine themselves as part of a wider community of readers. This new form of communication created a sense of simultaneity—people in different places consuming the same news at the same time—which gave shape to the imagined reality of the nation. Language standardisation through print further helped in unifying diverse populations into a shared cultural-linguistic community.

Anderson's concept has been widely celebrated for shifting attention from nations as "things" to nations as *cultural constructs*. However, critics argue that his emphasis on print capitalism underplays other forces such as political economy, state coercion, or pre-modern ethnic identities (points that ethnosymbolists highlight).

Nevertheless, likewise Anderson,Karl Deutsch also approached nationalism from a communication and social integration perspective, rather than purely cultural or political definitions. He argued that a nation is formed when a group of people becomes integrated through dense networks of communication, enabling them to share information, values, and experiences effectively. For Deutsch, what binds a nation is not race or language alone, but the ability of people to communicate more easily with one another than with outsiders, creating a sense of mutual belonging.

He emphasized the role of modernization—especially the spread of education, print media, and transportation—in fostering nationalism. These developments increase social mobilization, bringing previously isolated communities into closer interaction and allowing a shared national consciousness to emerge. Thus, nationalism, in Deutsch's view, is the product of growing communication flows and social cohesion, where a nation becomes a community of people linked by continuous interaction and shared understanding.

Let us Know

A prominent Marxist scholar and another proponent of social constructionism, Eric Hobsbawm, argued that many practices, rituals, and symbols that appear to be ancient elements of national culture are, in fact, relatively modern constructions. These

"traditions" are deliberately created—often by political elites or state institutions—to establish continuity with a suitable past and to legitimise the present.

The power of invented traditions, argues Hobsbawm, lies in their ability to generate emotional attachment and legitimacy. By appealing to the authority of the past, even newly created rituals or symbols can foster a sense of belonging and continuity. For instance, the Scottish kilt and tartan patterns were largely codified in the nineteenth century but came to be seen as symbols of ancient Scottish heritage. Similarly, colonial and postcolonial states invented or adapted traditions to legitimise themselves, often blending modern political authority with carefully selected cultural symbols.

Similarly, Ernest Gellner provides a detailed account of the emergence of nations and nationalism in the modern world. He categorically denies the existence of nationalism in pre-modern agrarian societies and situates its rise in the early stages of industrialisation. Gellner further argues that nationalism may eventually fade in more "mature, homogenous" industrial societies.

According to him, pre-modern agrarian societies were not conducive to the development of nationalism because of their inherent cultural stratification. There existed a wide gulf not only between the upper and lower strata but also within the lower classes themselves. Such fragmented cultural groupings lacked shared feelings, interests, or collective consciousness, without which the idea of a national community could not emerge.

Gellner also highlights the absence of a state-directed education system in agrarian societies. Knowledge and skills were transmitted primarily within families, from one generation to the next. This system restricted both vertical and horizontal social mobility, as individuals born into one group could not acquire the knowledge or skills of another. As a result, social groups remained insulated from each other, each developing its own context-based methods of communication, unintelligible to outsiders.

With the advent of industrialisation, however, these rigid barriers began to dissolve, creating fertile ground for the rise of nationalism and the nation-state. According to Gellner, the arrival of industrialisation brought a profound and irreversible transformation in the cultural landscape of society. Industrialisation created the need for mass literacy and a standardized system of education. Such a system ensured that workers from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds could effectively communicate with one another, read machine instruction manuals, operate equipment efficiently, and even rectify minor errors when necessary.Since such mass education campaigns could only be organised by the state, a state-directed education system emerged. Over time, this familiarised all groups with a common standard of communication. The standardisation of language, coupled with state-run education, opened up the possibility of both horizontal and vertical mobility across social strata. Now, even individuals from peasant backgrounds could acquire the skills necessary to undertake technical or engineering work.

This new social mobility in industrial society eroded the insulated cultural "nests" and identities rooted in birth. A peasant's son was no longer destined to remain

a peasant. Furthermore, industrialisation fostered what Gellner calls a "community of consumption": from top to bottom, people increasingly used the same goods and items—something that had been entirely absent in agrarian societies.

Thus, with industrialisation came the *homogenisation of culture*, in which either high culture was imposed upon populations with low culture, or the latter were assimilated into the former. In this context, Gellner argues that industrialisation functioned as a massive "cultural bulldozer," flattening out the diverse cultural differences of agrarian societies and reorganising the population of a region into a "large, shared high-cultural unit." This, in turn, became the precursor of modern national communities.

The prestige of the modern individual was no longer rooted in primordial ties of family, kinship, or local community, but in membership of this shared high culture, transmitted through a uniform state-directed education system. The individual was now a product of this common culture and had a vested interest in its preservation and protection. Crucially, he also understood that the safeguarding of this culture could only be ensured by the state—his own nation-state.

Following a similar line, a Czech historian and political theoristMiroslav Hrochexplains nationalism as a historical and constructed process, particularly in the case of 'small nations' that lacked political power within larger empires. He argues that nations do not arise automatically from shared language or culture; instead, they are shaped through active social and political mobilisation. Cultural elements such as language, folklore, and history may exist earlier, but they become 'national' only when intellectuals and activists begin to organize and promote them as part of a collective identity.

Hroch outlines this development through a three-phase model: first, **Phase A**, where intellectuals study and preserve language, culture, and history without political intent; second, **Phase B**, where activists begin to promote national consciousness and mobilize people; and finally, **Phase C**, where nationalism becomes a mass movement demanding political recognition or independence.Hroch emphasizes that this transition depends on key social preconditions like literacy, communication networks, and the growth of an educated middle class. Thus, nationalism emerges gradually through structured efforts and favourable socio-economic conditions, rather than simply from shared cultural traits.

3.5 ETHNO-SYMBOLISM

Ethno symbolism is a school of thought within nationalism studies that emerged as a critique of both primordialism and modernism. Primordialists regard nations as ancient and natural, while modernists emphasise their wholly modern and constructed character, often linked to industrialisation, print capitalism, and state formation. Ethno symbolism, by contrast, offers a middle path: it views nations as modern political formations but argues that they draw heavily on much older cultural resources. Its leading proponent, Anthony D. Smith, highlighted the enduring role of ethnic communities, myths, and symbols in shaping national identities.

Central to Smith's approach is the concept of the *ethnie*—a human community bound together by shared myths of descent, collective historical memories, cultural practices, and attachment to a particular territory. Ethno symbolists such as Smith, John Armstrong, and Adrian Hastings contend that nationalism cannot be fully understood without recognising how these pre-modern ethnies, along with their symbols and traditions, are reinterpreted and mobilised in the modern era.

In this regard, John A. Armstrong, in his influential book *Nations before Nationalism* (1982), challenges the idea that nations emerged suddenly in the modern era. Instead, he views modern nationalism as part of a much longer historical cycle of ethnic consciousness, arguing that only a long-term (*longue durée*) perspective can properly explain its development. This approach moves beyond the narrow focus on modernity and highlights deep-rooted cultural and symbolic continuities.

According to Armstrong, there was no abrupt or 'miraculous' birth of nations around events like the French Revolution. Rather, nations evolved gradually over time through historical processes of identity formation, shaped by myths, symbols, and collective memories. In this sense, nationalism is not purely a modern construct but the latest phase of a long evolution of ethnic identities.

The strength of ethno symbolism lies in its ability to explain the emotional resonance and resilience of nationalism. Nationalism is not merely an elite-driven or rational project; it draws its power from deep cultural memories and sacred foundations inherited from earlier times. Myths of origin, golden ages, and heroic traditions often provide the symbolic repertoire through which modern nations gain legitimacy. For instance, Zionism drew on biblical myths and Jewish memories of exile, while Irish nationalism invoked Celtic symbols and legendary heroes to construct a sense of continuity and distinctiveness.

At the same time, ethno symbolism distances itself from primordialism by insisting that nations are not timeless entities. Rather, they are modern creations that selectively revive and reinterpret fragments of the past to serve contemporary political purposes.

In fact, one can trace the roots of ethno symbolism in Ernest Renan's famous 1882 lecture 'What is a Nation?' as well. Renan rejected objective criteria such as race, language, religion, or geography as the basis of a nation. Instead, he argued that a nation is a 'spiritual principle' grounded in two elements: a shared legacy of memories and a present-day will to live together. For him, nations are not built on uniformity but on a collective consciousness shaped by history, including both pride in the past and the ability to forget painful or divisive events.

Renan famously described the nation as a 'daily plebiscite', meaning that its existence depends on the continuous consent of its people rather than fixed boundaries or ethnic unity. This makes nationalism, in his view, a voluntary and dynamic phenomenon, rooted in shared commitment rather than objective traits. Thus, a nation survives only as long as its members actively choose to sustain it, making national identity a matter of collective will and historical memory, rather than biology or language alone.

Critics, however, argue that ethno symbolism sometimes overstates the continuity of ethnic communities and risks sliding into a form of 'soft primordialism'. In many historical cases, pre-modern identities were fragmented, fluid, or overlapping, and the neat sense of continuity suggested by ethno symbolists may be more imagined than real. Nonetheless, by foregrounding the symbolic and cultural dimensions of nationalism, ethno symbolism offers a valuable corrective to purely modernist or materialist accounts.

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

After going through this unit, we have learnt about -

- The diverse theoretical approaches to understanding the origins of the idea of nation and nationalism.
- The historical trajectories and socio-political processes through which nations emerged in the world we inhabit today.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Fill in the blanks-

1. The leading proponent of linguistic primordialism is…….....
2. The idea of neo-primordialism is championed by …….....
3. The central pillar of Benedict Anderson's theory is the role of …….
4. According to Ernest Gellner, industrialization creates a unified'community of …….....……..'
5. The leading proponent of ethnosymbolism is…….. .....

3.7 FURTHER READINGS

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✓ 3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q 1. J.A. Laponce
Ans to Q 2. Samuel Huntington
Ans to Q 3. Print capitalism
Ans to Q 4. Consumption
Ans to Q 5. Anthony D. Smith

? 3.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Define nation and nationalism?
2. Enlist the major approaches in explaining the origin of nationalism?
3. Delineate the major criticisms of the primordialist approach to nationalism.
4. Critically evaluate the perennialist perspective on nationalism.
5. Explain Eric Hobsbawm's concept of the 'invention of tradition' and assess its relevance.
6. Examine Ernest Gellner's explanation of the rise of nationalism within industrial societies.
7. Discuss the ethnosymbolist approach to understanding the origins of nationalism.

UNIT 4 : NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 : Learning Objectives

4.2 : Introduction

4.3 : Defining Ethnicity

4.4 : Indentity and Conflict
Theories and Causes

4.5 : Let Us Sum Up

4.6 : Further Readings

4.7 : Answers to Check Your Progress

4.8 : Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Define and explain the concept of ethnicity and examine its relationship with identity, nationalism and nation-building.
- Examine the processes through which ethnic identities and boundaries are constructed, negotiated and politicised in different social and political contexts.
- Analyse the major theoretical perspectives on ethnicity and nationalism, particularly primordialism, constructivism and instrumentalism.
- Analyse the emergence and forms of ethnic nationalism by engaging with historical and contemporary examples, including Bengali and Assamese nationalism.
- Assess the complex relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, especially in the context of the tensions between ethnic/sub-national identities and broader territorial or civic nationalisms.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between nationalism and ethnicity is a complicated one. Scholars from different social science disciplines have struggled to arrive at a consistent answer to the question of how ethnicity plays into the formation and sustenance of a nation. The conceptual puzzle is further complicated by the wide diversity in case studies of nationalism and nation-state formation from across the world. One may broadly argue that there is no singular, linear theory that can explain the relationship between nationalism and ethnicity. However, we may identify some dominant patterns and impulses from both history and the contemporary period that can help us productively grasp some parts of this complex relationship. Doing so has become especially important today with the dramatic resurgence of what may be called 'ethnic nationalism' worldover. In simple words, ethnicity appears to have become salient once again in understanding the contours of nation-building, national consciousness and nationalism.

It is within this broad context that this chapter will explore the key scholarly understandings and debates around the relationship between nationalism and ethnicity. These debates are enmeshed in two large intellectual frameworks: primordialism and constructivism. While some scholars believe in the *a priori* existence of 'ethnicity' as a necessary *precondition* to nationalism, others consider it to be artificially assembled in the service of the collective *project* of nation-building. Yet others have built on these basic forms of thinking to take a more critical and context-specific view of ethnicity as a performative device to bolster nationalistic politics and consolidate elite networks. This paper will outline some of these debates, and briefly engage with them wherever relevant. In doing so, it will attempt to offer a critical overview of how ethnicity and nationalism may (or may not) be related. The final section will consider one case study – Bengali nationalism – to contextualise the scholarly debates in an empirical mode.

4.3 DEFINING 'ETHNICITY'

When Benedict Anderson (2006) famously argued that the nation is an 'imagined community', he already destabilised the relationship between 'ethnicity' and the 'nation'. In specifically arguing that the nation is imagined because the "members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" (Anderson, 2006: 6), he seemed to be dismissing the ethnic roots of a nation. But, what really is 'ethnicity'? Without defining the term, we may not be able to conceptualise the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. Much like 'nationalism' and 'nation', the definitional parameters of 'ethnicity' remain "ambiguous and vague" (Eriksen, 2010: 1). Yet, we cannot afford the Weberian view of dismissing or underestimating 'ethnicity' altogether in today's world for various reasons. Therefore, there is a need to make a continuous attempt to understand (and reunderstand) it in relation to the social, political and cultural forces of our times. As the Mizo scholar, Joy LK Pauchau (2014: 23), has argued, "the study of ethnicity and identity necessitates a location in history or time." Broadly, we may be drawn to seeing 'ethnicity' as a closely-bounded and coherent social phenomenon that holds together specific groups of people. But, this may not be the case, as scholars, most prominently anthropologists, who study actual social groups tell us.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2010: 4) attributes the first usage of the word 'ethnicity' to American sociologist, David Riesman, in 1953, while also alerting us to the ancient Greek origins of the word 'ethnic' (from *ethnos*). He leans on the definition offered by cultural anthropology as referring to "aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive" (Eriksen, 2010: 5). Anthony Smith (1989: 344-45) calls such units *'ethnies'* (from French), attributing five common traits to them – name, myths, homeland, culture and sense of solidarity. But, how culturally distinct are ethnic groups, really? Long before Eriksen, the Norwegian anthropologist, Fredrik Barth (1969: 38), argued that 'ethnic units' are groups that maintain their social boundaries through distinct cultural traits or 'differentiae', but are open to renegotiating those boundaries through interactive

relationships. In doing so, he authoritatively challenged the traditional anthropological view of 'ethnicity' as a homogeneous, self-perpetuating and tightly-bounded carrier of distinct cultures (Narroll, 1964 in Barth, 1969: 10-11). For Barth, by instead approaching 'ethnicity' through the lens of fluid and permeable 'boundaries', we remain conscious of the contingencies of social change. Eriksen himself is conscious of these fluid contours when he argues that ethnicity "refers to a multitude of socio-cultural phenomena" (Eriksen, 1991: 264). Notably, writing in the same period as Barth, Abner Cohen (1969) framed ethnicity as a political strategy used to mobilise specific interest groups, offering, along with Barth, the 'instrumentalist' view of the concept. Such understandings of ethnicity have remained central to the development of the scholarship on this issue till this date.

Paul Brass (1991: 19), using De Vos' definition of 'ethnic identity', similarly argues that ethnicity is the 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use' by "a group of people... of any aspect of culture in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups." He astutely asserts that "ethnicity is to ethnic category what class consciousness is to class." The American sociologist, Rogers Brubaker (2004: 4) argues that 'ethnicity' is not necessarily based on 'groupness' (or groupism), but rather works "in and through categories, schemas, encounters, identifications, languages, stories, institutions, organizations, networks, and events." Going one step further, and echoing the instrumentalist view, he argues that ethnicity is often invoked as part of a deliberate practice to "stir, summon, justify, mobilize, kindle, and energize" (Brubaker, 2004: 10). Following the logics of Brubaker and Brass, we may begin to assemble a conceptual understanding of the role that ethnicity plays in nationalistic endeavours. As we will see later, both deem 'ethnicity' as a core nationalising principle in the sense of it being a means to an end, the 'end' being the nation (or a nation-state). It is also possible, as Pachuau (2014: 21), drawing on the work of Katherine Verdery, argues, that the state produces ethnicity rather than the opposite. In doing so, they go beyond Barth's work on boundary production by foregrounding the specific political contexts in which 'ethnicity' evolves as a marker of social difference. This constructivist view is different from the view that some primordialists scholars take in treating 'ethnicity' as a deeper, prefigured psychological instinct in members of a group that offer them "an intuitive conviction of the group's separate origin and evolution" (Connor, 1994: 202). One of the fiercest proponents of this school was Pierre van den Berghe (1981) who framed ethnicity as a 'sociobiological' propensity of the human species to choose kin over nonkin.

It is prudent to take all three schools of thought – instrumentalist, constructivist and primordialist – in consideration while empirically studying ethnicity and its social, political and territorial expressions, such as nationalism, the nation and the nation-state. What is clear in a fundamental sense is that more and more scholars have been interested in studying and contextualising boundary-making processes around ethnicity – what Andreas Wimmer (2008: 1031) calls "strategies of boundary expansion and contraction" – rather than attempting to singularly define the term 'ethnicity'. There are some exceptions, however, such as the 'minimalist' definition offered by the India-American political scientist, Kanchan Chandra (2012: 51), in her introduction to an edited volume titled *Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics*: "Ethnic identities [...] are a *subset of categories in which descent-based attributes are necessary for*

membership." By further classifying ethnic identities into 'nominal' and 'activated', Chandra is able to factor into the anthropological framework of boundary construction, ultimately arguing that 'descent-based attributes' are necessary but not sufficient for inclusion into a particular ethnic group (Chandra, 2012: 59). Indeed, there are distinct ways in which scholars from different disciplines approach the boundary question as well as the dilemma between universalising and particularising the definition of 'ethnicity'. Yet, most of them broadly agree that 'ethnicity' holds a certain power in organisation and politics, mediating the relationship between specific groups of people while also providing "individuals with most of their social statuses" and cultural identities (Eriksen, 1991: 264). Drawing on these perspectives, further, we may creatively see the 'nation' as a sociopolitical collective that is as mutable and negotiable as 'ethnicity' itself. As a corollary, we may see the 'nation-state' serving as one of the most legible, though uncertain, boundaries of ethnic identity. In other words, as Wimmer (2008: 1031) has argued, "the politics of nation-building represents perhaps the best-studied strategy of [ethnic] boundary expansion."

4.4 IDENTITY AND CONFLICT – THEORIES AND CAUSES

Drawing from the previous discussion on the definitional parameters of 'ethnicity', we may slot the relationship between 'ethnicity' and 'nationalism' in two major theoretical baskets: primordialist and constructivist. For the sake of this analysis, the 'instrumentalist' view of the issue will be seen as a subset of the 'constructivist' view, with the assumption that any ethnic identity that is *instrumentalised* for specific political purposes must be *constructed* (rather than adopted as a pre-given phenomenon). The primordialist view, then, is the understanding that ethnicity is a *natural* and *essential* ingredient for nationalism and nation-building; that there can be no nation without an ethnic consciousness. Both theoretical approaches have their own value and must be leveraged to study empirical evidence on nationalism, such as in analysing specific case studies.

a) Primordialism: no ethnicity, no nation?

The American political scientist, Walker Connor (1994: 197), writing in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War, argued compellingly that the "essence of the nation is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the subconscious conviction of its members, from all nonmembers in a most vital way." He did so to challenge scholars who gave too much importance to a set of 'objective' criteria, such as language, religion and territory, for national inclusion. What Connor, in essence, was alluding to is a primordialist understanding of ethnicity as a deeply-entrenched, subjective and necessary precondition for nationalism. 'Ethnicity', for him, was a psychological phenomenon that transcended material, social and economic registers. To prove his point, Connor showed that the tactic of appealing to common kinship-based ties – what he called an 'ethnonational psychology' – was successfully adopted by not just outright fascists, like Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, but also communist revolutionaries, like Mao Tse-tung and Ho Chi Minh (Connor, 1994: 199,

202), to rouse nationalist sentiments. Connor, therefore, asserted an enduring link between ethnicity and nationalism, pushing forward the concept of 'ethnonationalism'.

Writing much before him, Edward Shils (1957), based on his interviews with Nazi sympathisers, identified a set of 'primordial, personal and sacred ties' that came together as nationhood. Both Connor and Shils were essentially arguing that there were pre-rational or non-rational aspects of national consciousness, which may be abstracted under the broad label of 'ethnicity' (although Shils mostly avoids the term). Taking a somewhat more nuanced and situational view, the noted American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz (1973: 243), argued there was certainly something "irrational" about nationalism, but it is "more than a collective derangement; it is a social cataclysm in the process of happening." In other words, he conceded that nationalist leaders deliberately soldered a set of preexisting "cultural, racial, local, and linguistic categories of self-identification" with a "simple, abstract, deliberately constructed [...] political ethnicity" – a proper 'nationality' in the modern manner" (Geertz, 1973: 239). In that sense, while not being a pure primordialist, Geertz did believe that a set of prefigured identities was necessary for nationalism to have become possible in its modern form. The noted British historical sociologist, Anthony D Smith (1989), too insisted on the existence of ancient sociocultural units – *ethnies* – sharing common traits that ultimately formed the basis of nations. *Ethnies*, for Smith (1989: 348), offered "ready-made bases for political movements of autonomy" with the dawn of the age of nationalism. He countered the 'modernist' position by arguing that all nations "possess a common history and culture, that is to say, common myths of origin and descent, common memories and common symbols of culture" (Smith, 1989: 348). Like Geertz, however, Smith wasn't a pure primordialist as he not only distinguished between pre-modern and modern nations and their structural constituents, but also understood internal stratifications within *ethnies,* such as in the case of Normans (Smith, 1989: 346).

John Armstrong too emphasises a set of 'political myths' or *mythomoteur* that consolidate a sense of ethnic continuity from the past (Armstrong, 1982 in Smith, 2015: 166-67). Drawing on this basic argument, as Smith (2015: 169) explains, Armstrong observes that "modern nations can emerge from centuries-long processes of symbolic identification with pre-modern ethnic groups." In fact, Armstrong argues that modern nation-states emerged when 'consciousness of ethnic identity became a predominant force for constituting indepen-ent political structures' (Smith, 2015: 169). Steven Grosby (2005: 8) similarly foregrounds a set of 'memories' that constitute a nation over a long period of time and are conveyed through "stories, myths, and history". Unlike Berghe, Grosby doesn't take a sociobiological view of the nation and instead, approaches nationhood through the lens of a "collective consciousness", which he refers to in terms of a "social relation of each of a number of individuals as a consequence of those individuals participating in the same evolving tradition" (Grosby, 2005: 9). Interestingly, however, he draws a distinction between 'civil' and 'ethnic' nations, while arguing that most nations are a mix of both (Grosby, 2005: 33). In that sense, Grosby isn't really a pure primordialist when it comes to drawing a line between 'ethnicity' and 'nationalism'.

In fact, none of the scholars cited above can be categorised as pure primordialists. However, all of them carry shades of primordialism in the sense of attaching a pre-modern, continuous and sociopsychological quality to 'ethnicity' and framing it as a natural glue for national collectives. Indeed, one may argue that no genuine social scientist who is close to the ground, cognisant of proven historical realities and alert to the sociopolitical shifts in societies around them would argue that nationalism is a linear or singular product of the 'natural' phenomenon of ethnicity (or vice-versa). Modern nations are built on a wide variety of collective myths, social networks and political institutions, and ethnicity is merely one among them. But, is it an organic ingredient of nationhood? Or is it handpicked and assembled for specific ends?

b) Constructivism: means to an end

As argued above, most primordialists have a constructivist edge, and vice-versa. For instance, while Smith (1989: 350) believed in the pre-modern existence of *ethnies*, he also argued that in many cases, an "upper-class *ethnie*" used bureaucratic means to stitch together a national political entity. This also encouraged the intermixing of different ethnic communities, creating a more diverse political supra-community. The basic constructivist position, therefore, is that ethnicity was not a natural segway to nationhood, but rather a co-constituent that helped dominant social groups, such as class or ethnic elites, assemble a coherent political community. Implicit also in this line of thinking is the non-natural character of 'ethnicity' itself; that ethnicity is a carefully constructed assemblage of a common cultural consciousness, historical myths, modern political devices and materially-driven social impulses.

Among the constructivists, Benedict Anderson is perhaps the most well-known. His approach to nationhood as an "imagined community" is based on the basic assumption that 'ethnicity' itself is imagined (but not false) (Anderson, 2006: 6). It offers a refreshing and historically-attentive way to understand how nations emerged from an admixture of cultural and non-cultural factors under specific social, political and economic conditions. In fact, Anderson's approach is unique because he argues that cultural unifiers (such as shared religious dogmas and cosmological myths) gave way to secular unifiers under the specific context of print-capitalism, "which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways" (Anderson, 2006: 36). Although he doesn't directly dwell on the aspect of ethnicity, Anderson gives us a new way to think about ethnic nationhood beyond the idea of linear continuity between the historical and the modern. It allows us to envision nationalism as the product of a transformation of a pre-modern ethnic consciousness into a modern political project on account of wider structural shifts in the dominant economic order. In doing so, we do not junk 'ethnicity' as a precondition for nationalism, but instead, see it as a phenomenon whose meaning and implications for society changed under historical circumstances. In the Andersonian mode of thinking, 'ethnicity' is neither organic nor artificial, but merely an *imagined* canvas for collective political consciousness.

Using Soviet-ruled Eastern Europe as an example, Brubaker (2004: 52-53) shows how ethnicity can be used by certain political regimes to construct new forms of territorially-affixed nationalistic identities. He does so while being skeptical of the sense

of 'bounded groupness' that is widely ascribed to the term 'identity'. Barth is, therefore, careful to distinguish between the *use* of ethnic identities by top-down regimes for the "representation of social reality, the framing of political claims, and the organization of political action" and its *role* in "everyday life" in "framing perception, orienting action, or shaping self-understanding" (Brubaker, 2004: 54). This is a nuanced and highly context-sensitive application of the constructivist view on the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. One may argue it is also a critical application of the 'instrumentalist' view, which treats ethnicity as a ready-made device that certain social groups can use for concrete political ends. Barth's emphasis on using 'cognitive research' is also useful in reconciling the differences between the primordialist and instrumentalist (and by extension, constructivist) positions on ethnicity, rather than summarily dismissing the inherent value of ethnicity. By doing so, we may be able to foreground discursive framing processes to appreciate the "variable salience of ethnicity and variable resonance of ethnicized discourse" in provoking nationalistic sentiments (Brubaker, 2004: 85). In a similar mode of thinking, Craig Calhoun (1993: 223) argues that ethnicity is a "rhetorical frame within which certain disputes are conducted; participation in the disputes can actually reproduce ethnic understandings (changed or unchanged)." Another set of constructivist views is offered by Ernest Gellner (1983: 81) who treats 'ethnicity' as one of the several transformative components of nationalism, arguing that the "principle of nationalism [...] requires ethnic and political boundaries to converge." For Gellner (1983: 85), a "dominant high culture" may endear long enough within a group to allow that group to attain a "political sense of ethnicity" and ultimately, a nation-state. Challenging the Marxist view that conflated ethnic difference with class contradictions, he argued that "ethnicity enters the political sphere as 'nationalism' at times when cultural homogeneity or continuity (not classlessness) is required by the economic base of social life, and when consequently culture-linked class differences become noxious, while ethnically unmarked, gradual class differences remain tolerable" (Gellner, 1983: 94). Therefore, Gellner offers an analytically productive way to harmonise cultural and economic factors while understanding nationalism.

In exploring the link between 'ethnicity' and 'nationalism', we may want to dwell on the core difference between both. The noted British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, does this well. He argues that while nationalism is a *programme*, ethnicity isn't (Hobsbawm & Kertzer, 1992: 4). Ethnicity, he eloquently argues, is "one way of filling the empty containers of nationalism" (Hobsbawm & Kertzer, 1991: 4). In doing so, he also pushes back against the primordialists by highlighting the *ideological* nature of ethnicity-based nationalistic claims, such as in the 'right to return' of 'ethnic Germans' within the historical concept of *Volksdeutsche*. Therefore, 'ethnicity' as a category can be deployed for various purposes, including rationalising the right to return to a historical 'homeland'. At the same time, however, Hobsbawm argues that the "core of ethnic politicization is not instrumental" as it involves a "familiar nostalgia for 'roots'" (Hobsbawm & Kertzer, 1992: 5). Brubaker (2004: 12-13) dwells on the value of 'ethnicity' as a 'category', rather than a 'group', that allows 'people and organisations' to *do things*. Calling for ethnicity to be envisioned 'without groups', he argues that a "focus on categories [...] can illuminate the multifarious ways in which ethnicity, race, and nationhood can exist and "work" without the existence of ethnic groups as substantial entities" (Brubaker, 2004: 13). To take this line of thinking is to treat ethnicity as a set of

categorical practices that makes nationhood (along with other things) *possible*, rather than an all-pervading phenomenon that makes nationhood *inevitable.* This may also mean that ethnicity, in certain nation-building contexts, could be consciously or unconsciously sidelined, leading to the development of multiethnic nationalism. This happened, for example, in the case of Switzerland where transregional ideological and class-based alliances took precedence, as a result of which "an ethnic answer to the question of peoplehood never developed" (Wimmer, 2011: 732). Indian nationalism took a similar direction, as a collective sense of secular peoplehood and territorialist ideology cutting across ethno-linguistic groups took precedence in both the Gandhian mass movement repertoire and the constituent assembly debates. However, the formation of new states, especially those in the Northeast, through the postcolonial years did take an ethnic turn, which only shows the variable nature of 'ethnicity' as a category of 'practice' (Brubaker, 2004).

Thus, ethnicity-based peoplehood culminating in a nationalist project can take two directions, as Paul Brass (1991: 2) argues: "transformation of an ethnic group in a multiethnic state into a selfconscious political entity or by the amalgamation of diverse groups and the formation of an inter-ethnic, composite or homogeneous national culture through the agency of the modern state." India shows that both processes can take place in tandem, and within a singular politico-territorial geography. For Brass (1991), nationalist elites have to reconcile with and tolerate different iterations and meanings of ethnicity in order to create and sustain national projects, such as in the case of India. He outlines a detailed, two-stage process by which ethnicity may be creatively transformed into a nationalistic pivot: movement from ethnic category to community; and transformation of ethnic groups involving the articulation and acquisition of social, economic, and political rights for the members of the group as a whole (Brass, 1991: 22-23). In an earlier essay, Brass (1985) argued that the 'state' has a powerful role in empowering certain ethnic (and non-ethnic) groups through specific means, such as elite patronage, in order to differentially allocate resources. In arguing so, Brass presents a conjoint constructivist-instrumentalist position on the ethnicity-nationalism relationship, wherein ethnic identity is understood as something that has to be cautiously and deliberately assembled, almost like a jigsaw puzzle, in order to achieve something else, that is an ethnocentric national entity or a state where a particular ethnic group has privileged claims to its resources. Proposing a further course of study, he argues that "a principal task of research on ethnic groups and the state" is to "determine how privileges are distributed among different ethnic categories, with which elites within an ethnic group state leaders tend to collaborate, and what the consequences of both are for ethnic group identity formation and political mobilization" (Brass, 1985: 9-10).

In a similar vein but taking a counterfactual scenario, Eriksen (1991: 265) makes the interesting argument that the "major difference between ethnicity and nationalism lies [...] in their relationship to the state" as unsuccessful nationalisms become relegated to ethnicities that "more or less reside uncomfortably under the aegis of a state that they do not identify with their own nationality or ethnic category."

- **Ethnic nationalisms in practice**

If the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is variable, situational and non-linear, then it is simply impossible to create a comprehensive or definitive list of 'ethnic nations'. It is easier, however, to identify 'ethnic nationalism' (or ethnonationalism) as an ideological and political *practice* in different historical and contemporary settings. The bulk of the academic literature on ethnic nationalism, some of which are mentioned in the previous sections, centres around European examples. This is unsurprising given that modern forms of ethnic nationalism were both born and challenged in Europe, at least at scale. The wave of decolonisation that swept through the world starting around the middle of the 20th century transplanted some of these forms of nationalism into Asia and Africa, often precipitating into chauvinistic forms of ethnonationalism that discriminated against minorities. Postcolonial states like India, Burma and Indonesia that chose non-ethnic (or trans-ethnic) forms of nation-hood were partially influenced by the menacing turn that ethnonationalist movements took in parts of Europe, such as in Germany and Italy. German "nationalist history-writing", particularly, pursues a "'naturalizing' account of German ethnicity" based on the idea that "Germany must be rooted in an "always already existing" ethnic identity (Calhoun, 1993: 221). History is testament to how these ethnically-rooted ideas of German nationalism found expression in extreme right-wing projects that believed in racially purifying the German nation. Yet, despite the demise of such movements, ethnonationalist ideals have endured in the German body politic, as opposed to civic ideals in neighbouring France, manifesting in domains such as citizenship (Calhoun, 1993: 221). Not just that, principles of ethnic nationalism have also seeped into previously civic forms of nationalism, such as in the case of India under the Bharatiya Janata Party and the United States under President Donald Trump.

In some ways, these transformations reaffirm the primordialist understanding of ethnicity as an inevitable and core trait of nationalism. In effect, secular 'big' nationalisms had to eventually come to terms with the reality of ethnic 'little' (or sub-) nationalisms – as evinced by the dramatic surge of ethnic movements for self-determination in Northeast India, northern and eastern Burma and in northwestern Indonesia during the postcolonial period. Moreover, many of these trans-ethnic national geographies have slowly but surely started to look more and more like pure 'ethnic nations', thanks to the rise of new forms of right-wing 'big' nationalisms that have not only begun to amplify specific *mythomoteurs* (see Armstrong, 1982 in Smith, 2015: 166-67), or historical myths around the continuous preexistence of dominant social groups, but also co-opt or suppress competitive ethnic 'little' nationalisms within their territorial remits. Here, one is tempted to agree with Wimmer (2008: 1030) when he disregards the "distinctions between 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalisms and a range of similar typologies prominent in the field of nationalism studies because they are based on differences in cultural content rather than structural form." This means that "culture" is a vague criterion to assess the nature and trajectory of different types of nationalisms. Civic nationalisms (like Nehruvian nationalism) can have strong cultural cores that can eventually morph into ethnic nationalisms; contrarily, ethnic nationalisms may have dominant civic traits that opens up avenues to build multiethnic polities.

In practice, ethnic nationalism can take different forms and be expressed in different modes. In some cases, it may even exceed the remit of the territorial nation-state by expressing a desire to protect or speak for certain ethnic units in a *transborder* national space. Brubaker (1996: 5) calls this 'homeland nationalism', invoked in the service of creating "external national homelands". Conceptually, such a form of nationalism demonstrates not only the power of 'ethnicity' as a sociopolitical organising principle, but also the possibility of the 'ethnic' transcending the 'national'. An 'ethnic nation', therefore, may look much larger and more shapeless than a 'territorial nation', which is territorially bounded and affixed to a specific geography. Interestingly, such a form of ethnic nationalism contradicts the basic tenets of nationalism itself, that is, a politico-territorial unit bounded by legible borders. One may then argue that homeland nationalisms "arise in direct opposition to and in dynamic interaction with nationalizing nationalisms" (Brubaker, 1996: 5). However, this is not always true, as homeland nationalisms and nationalizing nationalisms can also operate in tandem. For instance, in the case of Hindu nationalism, ethnopolitical consciousness within a specific 'nation' – India – is simultaneously leveraged to consolidate transborder Hindu consciousness, especially in the post-partition geographies of South Asia. Similarly, Zionism seeks to consolidate a Jewish homeland within Israel while constantly claiming to represent Jewish interests in other regions.

Taking a case study from South Asia itself, Bengali nationalism is a rare instance of a strong ethnic movement successfully culminating into a sovereign nation (-state) within the South Asian subcontinent, that is, Bangladesh. Initially woven around a common language, it found militant expression in relation to Pakistani nationhood that emerged from the Muslim League's politics of religious self-determination. 'Language' here may be treated as a sub-set of a larger ethnic consciousness built on a common Bengali cultural heritage and history that transcended internal colonial boundaries. Unlike Balochi and Pashtun ethnic identities that failed to carve out their sovereign national spaces from within the postcolonial Pakistani state, Bengali nationalism, owing to a fortuitous alignment of multiple political and geopolitical factors, was able to transform its ethnic core into a territorially-bounded national entity. It showed how "ethnic and political boundaries [can] converge" around the "principle of nationalism" (Gellner, 1983: 81). At the same time, this landmark political transformation was framed within two other key, interlinked registers – religious and economic. While the newly-formed nation of Bangladesh was initially premised on secular peoplehood, steered by the Awami League, Muslim majoritarianism has continued to play a central role in national politics, constantly recalibrating the nature of Bangladeshi nationhood through the last five decades. More importantly, Muslim majoritarian politics within the larger framework of Bengali nationalism has unfolded on the back of "rancorous relations" between the Muslim peasants and Hindu *zamindars* or the landowning elite (Kabir, 1987: 477).

In that sense, it presents a fascinating case of ethnicity operating in a dual primordialist and constructivist-instrumentalist mode where a preexisting cultural register was meticulously repurposed for a dissentious movement for political self-determination under specific socio-economic conditions. In fact, Bengali 'ethnicity' itself emerges as a hybrid product of cultural and non-cultural co-constituents, negating the possibility of the continued existence of any 'pure' or monolithic Bengali ethnicity. In

some ways, it is then similar to how Amalendu Guha (1980: 1705) frames Assamese nationalism – a 'little nationalism' that is shaped by the interplay of the quest for ethno-political power with class formation dynamics. In fact, Assamese nationalism in neighbouring Assam (once part of the same colonial geography as Bengal) presents another fascinating case study of ethnic nationalism that is produced (and reproduced) by the messy interaction between a 'pure' ethnic core and specific social, political and economic circumstances that emerged during the late colonial and postcolonial periods. At the same, Assamese nationalism, unlike Bengali nationalism in Bangladesh's context, is a useful lens to study the complicated relationship between ethnic (Assamese) subnationalism and territorial (Indian) nationalism. As Sanjib Baruah (2005: 5) argues, beyond the "politics of identity", the tension between the "politics of nationality" in Assam and the "pan-Indian national community" gives us a glimpse into a world of "real or imagined homelands".

Thus, ethnic contentions in Assam are expressed in the vocabulary contained in the wider universe of Indian constitutional norms, rather than in the language of separate statehood (Baruah, 1999: 5). It is for this reason that he adds the suffix 'sub-' to Assamese nationalism, revealing the contingent nature of the 'ethnic' in Assamese ethnic nationalism. In some ways, it is the collision of two imagined homelands whose 'ethnic' nature fluctuates from time to time. Yet, a puritan iteration of ethnic identity has unmistakably shaped Assam's politics and electoral considerations since the early post-independence period wherein the Indian National Congress (INC), representing pan-Indian nationalism, was forced to "take measures to protect the Assamese national identity" (Baruah & Goswami, 1999: 2494). This identity question, which was in large parts framed by language, was also shaped by other social and economic factors, such as agrarian discontents and competition over land due to the migration of Bengali peasants into Assam province (Misra, 1999). Broadly, there was always an uncertain dialectic between the Assamese ethnic identity and Indian nationalism, marked sometimes by the latter's violent suppression or strategic co-optation of the latter. In the current context, one may see Hindu nationalism's successful foray into Assam as the co-optation of a smaller, regional ethnic nationalism by a larger and more powerful ethnic nationalism.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What is meant by ethnicity according to Thomas Hylland Eriksen?

Q2: What are the three major theoretical approaches to ethnicity?

Q3: What is the primordialist view of the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism?

Q4: What does Benedict Anderson mean by the term 'imagined community'?

Q5: How does Assamese nationalism illustrate the relationship between ethnic and territorial nationalism?

4.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, you have learnt that-

- The two major theoretical approaches to examine the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism are - primordialism and constructivism.And there us no single explanation which is sufficient.
- Neither approach completely explains ethnicity and nationalism on its own. Understanding ethnic nationalism requires insights and methods from both perspectives.
- Bengali and Assamese nationalism show that the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism is complex, changing and non-linear. It can take different forms depending on the geographical and political context.
- A common feature of ethnic nationalism is the deliberate use of historical memories, cultural traditions and ideas about the past to address present political concerns and mobilise people for political action.
- The emphasis on Hindu identity and historical claims has significantly influenced the character of contemporary Indian democracy.

4.6 FURTHER READING

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✓ 4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: According to Eriksen, ethnicity refers to aspects of relationships between groups that consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as culturally distinctive.

Ans to Q2: he three major approaches are primordialism, constructivism and instrumentalism.

Ans to Q3: The primordialist view considers ethnicity to be a natural and essential ingredient of nationalism and nation-building. It argues that ethnic consciousness provides a deeply rooted psychological basis for national identity.

Ans to Q4: Anderson argues that a nation is an "imagined community" because members of even a small nation cannot know, meet or interact with most of their fellow-members. National belonging is therefore based on an imagined sense of collective community.

Ans to Q5: Assamese nationalism illustrates the tension between Assamese ethnic subnationalismand Indian territorial nationalism**.** It represents a form of ethnic nationalism that operates within the broader framework of Indian constitutional and territorial nationalism.

? 4.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Critically examine the primordialist and constructivist approaches to ethnicity.

Q2."Ethnicity is not a natural precondition for nationalism but a means to an end." Discuss this constructivist claim with reference to Anderson.

Q3. Analyse Paul Brass's two-stage model of how an ethnic category transforms into a nationalist political force.

Q4. What does Wimmer mean when he argues that the civic/ethnic nationalism distinction rests on "differences in cultural content rather than structural form"? Evaluate the implications of this argument for how we classify nationalist movements like Hindu nationalism in India.

Q5. Discuss the concept of "homeland nationalism" (Brubaker) with examples such as Hindu nationalism and Zionism. How does this phenomenon challenge the assumption that nationalism is necessarily tied to a bounded territorial state?

UNIT 5: NATIONALISM AND GENDER

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Nationalism

- Sexuality
- Masculinity

5.4 Women and Nation

5.5 Memory and Identity

5.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.7 Further Readings

5.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.9 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to-

- examine the relationship between nationalism and gender,
- analyze the intersections of sexuality, masculinity, and femininity in nationalist discourses,
- evaluate the contributions and representations of women in nationalist movements,
- explore the role of memory and identity in shaping gendered narratives of the nation.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

Nationalism and gender are deeply interconnected, as the idea of the nation is often imagined, represented, and sustained through gendered identities, roles, and power relations. Nationalist movements have historically relied on notions of masculinity and femininity to define ideals of citizenship, sacrifice, honour, and belonging. While men have frequently been portrayed as protectors, warriors, and political leaders, women have often been represented as biological and cultural reproducers of the nation, entrusted with preserving traditions, values, and collective identity. These representations shape not only political discourse but also social norms surrounding gender, sexuality, and citizenship.

This Unit will make an attempt to examine how nationalism constructs and regulates gender and sexual identities. At the same time, feminist and queer perspectives challenge these dominant narratives by revealing the exclusions and inequalities embedded within nationalist projects. The diverse roles played by women

in nation-building, through their active participation in anti-colonial struggles, social reform movements, political leadership, and grassroots activism is also explored. National identities are also formed and shaped by memory of migrations and partitions.

5.3 NATIONALISM

The relationship between gender identities, nationalism, and freedom movements in India is an important theme in modern Indian history. It shows how ideas about masculinity, feminity, and social roles were closely connected with the rise of Indian nationalism during the struggle against British colonial rule. Scholars such as Geraldine Forbes, Partha Chatterjee, Mrinalini Sinha, and Tanika Sarak have analyzed how gender shaped nationalist politics and social reform. They argued that colonial rule created a new arena where gender became a key site of ideological contestation between the British and Indian society. The colonial period thus witnessed both the reinforcement of patriarchal structures and the emergence of new spaces for women's participation in public life.

Understanding Gender Identities in Colonial Context

Gender Identity refers to the social and cultural roles associated with men and women in a particular society. Gender identities in colonial India were shaped by the interaction of traditional social structures, colonial ideologies, social reform movements, and nationalist politics from the late eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.During the colonial period in India, British officials and missionaries often portrayed Indian society as backward and oppressive to women. The nineteenth century witnessed several reform movements aimed at addressing social practices affecting women. Issues such as sati, purdah, female infanticide,child marriage, widow remarriage and female education became central debates. Indian reformers were influenced by Western liberal ideas and indigenous traditions. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar tried to reform these practices. The abolition of Sati in 1829 under the influence of Raja Ram Mohan Roy became a major example of colonial intervention in Indian social practices.Raja Ram Mohan Roy campaigned against the practice, leading to legislation under Governor-General Lord William Bentinck. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar played a major role in promoting widow remarriage by passing the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act, 1856. Reformers like Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule made pioneering contributions by opening schools for girls and lower-caste communities, challenging both gender and caste hierarchies. Similarly, organizations like the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj promoted female education and social reform within a religious framework. While the abolition of Sati was celebrated as a humanitarian reform, it also reinforced the colonial narrative that British rule was necessary to civilize Indian society. Colonial officials used such issues to claim that British rule was a 'civilizing mission.' This narrative has been famously described by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as the discourse of "white men saving brown women from brown men." Scholars have demonstrated that Indian nationalism simultaneously challenged colonial domination and reinforced indigenous patriarchy. Indian nationalists responded by reworking gender identities to assert cultural superiority and political autonomy. However, rather than completely dismantling patriarchal norms, they redefined them within a nationalist framework. Thus, gender

became a crucial site where the tensions between tradition and modernity, colonialism and nationalism, and reform and control were played out.

- **Sexuality**

The concept of sexuality in the Indian national movement is a complex and layered theme that intersects with gender, body politics, morality, and the construction of the nation. Sexuality in colonial India was not merely about sexual behavior; it was deeply embedded in Social norms and morality, gender relations, colonial knowledge systems and nationalist ideology. The British actively intervened in regulating Indian sexuality through laws and institutions. **Age of Consent Act (1891)** was introduced which raised the age of consent for girls, sparking intense nationalist debate.**Contagious Diseases Acts** which targeted Indian women (especially prostitutes) to control venereal diseases among British soldiers. Indian nationalists did not simply reject colonial critiques; instead, they redefined sexuality in a way that aligned with nationalist goals. Women's sexuality became a symbol of cultural authenticity and national identity.Within this framework, nationalism produced the concept of the '**new woman**.' This idea of a "new woman" meant women should be educated, morally pure, and self-disciplined. She was supposed to be the embodiment of the nation's spiritual strength and was expected to remain within limits of respectability. Thus, this "new woman" was not sexually liberated but sexually controlled and idealized.She was expected to be educated, cultured, morally pure and devoted to family values. This ideal allowed nationalists to accept certain aspects of Western modernity while preserving what they considered the spiritual superiority of Indian culture. However, historians argue that this model restricted women to domestic roles even while praising their moral importance.

Partha Chatterjee, in *The Nation and Its Fragments*, argues that Indian nationalism divided life into two spheres: **the outer domain** (material sphere) and **the inner domain** (spiritual sphere). The sphere of outer domain included politics, economy, science and administration. It was associated with Western modernity and was largely dominated by men. The Inner domain included home, family, religion and culture. Women were considered the guardians of this sphere. Tanika Sarkar analyzes how nationalism constructed an ideal of womanhood tied to sexuality as it started perceiving women as chaste, self-sacrificing and spiritually superior.In theory female sexuality was controlled, idealized and politicized. Sikata Banerjee highlights how women's bodies become linked to national honor, meaning that violence against women is interpreted as an attack on the nation itself. Uma Chakravarti introduces the concept of Brahmanical patriarchy, linking caste and gender in her book Conceptualising Brahmanical patriarchy in early India. Nationalism reinforced endogamy, female chastity and women's bodies became sites for maintaining caste order and national identity. Gayatri ChakravortySpivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' examines how marginalized voices, especially women, are silenced. Women's sexuality was spoken for by colonial and nationalist elites and rarely expressed by women themselves. Lata Mani, in her work on sati, argues that debates were not about women but about tradition and authority. Female sexuality was used symbolically and controlled through religious discourse. Gandhian theory of sexuality was that sexuality must be controlled through brahmacharya (celibacy) and even within marriage, restraint was supposed to be ideal. Sexual discipline became a tool of political resistance**.** The common message

that emerged from these theories was that sexuality was not private, it was deeply political, shaping the very idea of the Indian nation.

- **Masculinity**

Colonial Construction of MasculinityGender identities in colonial India were not limited to women alone. Colonial discourse also shaped ideas about masculinity. Masculinity was not a fixed biological trait but a historically constructed and politically contested identity, shaped by colonial discourse and nationalist responses. During British rule, Indians were often portrayed as effeminate and weak, which led to the emergence of multiple models of masculinity within nationalist thought—ranging from martial and aggressive forms to moral and spiritual ones. Historians such as Mrinalini Sinha have argued that these stereotypes were part of a broader colonial ideology that justified imperial domination.In *Colonial Masculinity*, Sinha shows that British discourse portrayed Indian men as effeminate, weak, and lacking martial qualities. Colonial administrators and writers propagated the stereotype of the "effeminate Bengali," initially targeting the educated middle-class intelligentsia who were increasingly demanding political rights, and later generalizing this label to Indian men as a whole in order to undermine their political claims. Such representations were reinforced through policies like the Arms Act of 1878, which effectively disarmed large sections of the Indian population, symbolically stripping them of martial power and reinforcing their supposed inferiority. This discourse was further popularized by colonial writers such as Katherine Mayo, whose book Mother India portrayed Indian society as morally and socially degenerate, using both the condition of women and the alleged weakness of men to argue against Indian self-rule. In response, Indian intellectuals sought to redefine masculinity by emphasizing upon physical strength, courage and bravery, discipline and moral character. Sexuality became a marker of racial and political power. Indian men redefined masculinity through discipline, celibacy and moral superiority. Figures such as Swami Vivekananda called for "muscles of iron and nerves of steel" which symbolized a synthesis of physical strength, mental resilience, and spiritual power, forming the basis of a new nationalist masculinity in colonial India.Physical culture movements, gymnasiums, and martial training became popular among nationalist youth. These developments reflected the desire to construct a new masculine identity capable of challenging colonial authority. In *The Intimate Enemy*, Ashish Nandy explores the psychological impact of colonialism on gender and sexuality. Colonialism imposed Victorian sexual morality on Indian society and created rigid binaries like masculine versus feminine and strong versus weak.

5.4 WOMAN AND NATION

The rise of Indian nationalism introduced new ways of thinking about gender roles. Nationalist leaders sought to reconcile modernity with Indian traditions.

Women's Education and Emergence of Female Voices

One of the most significant developments of the colonial period was the expansion of women's education. Real impetus for women's political awakening came from a combination of social, educational, and ideological forces. Foremost among these were social reform movements led by figures like **Raja Ram Mohan Roy** and **Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar**, who challenged practices such as sati, child marriage,

and restrictions on widow remarriage, thereby creating conditions for women's emancipation. Equally significant was the spread of Western education and the establishment of institutions for women, which produced an emerging class of educated women capable of engaging with political ideas. Manmohan Kaur highlights the role of Christian missionaries and reform associations in promoting female literacy and social awareness. They established schools for girls in urban centres. The rise of an Indian middle class, print culture, and early nationalist organizations further contributed to the dissemination of political consciousness among women.. Women gradually began to participate in literary and intellectual activities by writing autobiographies, essays, social critiques, journals and magazines, etc. Women writers like **Pandita Ramabai** criticized social practices such as child marriage and the oppression of widows. Her writings highlighted the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal society and advocated greater educational opportunities. Despite these developments, female literacy remained extremely low, particularly in rural areas. Education was seen as necessary for creating ideal wives and mothers who could raise enlightened families.

Art and the Feminization of the Nation

One of the most powerful artistic expressions of nationalism was the feminization of India as a mother figure.

Bharat Mata as Artistic Symbol

The figure of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a powerful artistic and political symbol within the Indian national movement, reflecting the convergence of nationalism, religion, and visual culture under colonial rule. India was personified a Bharat Mata, a sacred mother who needed to be protected from colonial rule. This symbolism was popularized through literature, art, and political movements.The earliest and most influential representation is often attributed to Abanindranath Tagore, whose 1905 painting depicted Bharat Mata as a serene, saffron-clad, ascetic woman holding objects such as a book, sheaves of grain, and a rosary—symbols of learning, sustenance, and spirituality.This image, created in the context of the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi movement, marked a shift from abstract notions of territory to a personalized, sacred embodiment of the nation. Drawing upon older Hindu iconographic traditions, especially goddess worship (such as Durga), Bharat Mata was visualized as both nurturing and powerful, thereby mobilizing emotional and religious devotion for political ends. Through prints, posters, and nationalist literature—including Anandamath and its hymn "Vande Mataram" written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay depicted the nation as a divine mother figure. This artistic symbol circulated widely, transforming the nation into a mother figure whose protection became a moral duty. Historically, the image functioned as a unifying device against colonial rule, yet it also carried implicit cultural boundaries, often privileging Hindu imagery and thereby shaping the ideological contours of Indian nationalism.

Women artists and emerging female agency

While male artists dominated early nationalist art, women artists gradually began to express their own perspectives. Amrita Shergil is one of the most important figures in this context. Her paintings depicted rural women, laboring women, and

everyday life. It focused on female subjectivity and inner emotions. Literature during the nationalist period became a powerful medium for expressing women's ideas. Women writers like Sarojini Naidu, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Subhadra Kuamri Chauhan used poetry and prose to explore women's roles. Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain's "Sultana's Dream" imagined a world where women ruled society and men lived in seclusion. It imagines science and rationality flourishing under women's leadership.

Gandhi and Women's Symbolism during the Indian National Movement

"Gandhi's politics transformed women from symbols of cultural purity into active agents of non-violent resistance, yet this empowerment remained embedded within traditional ideals of feminity."

The role of women in the Indian National Movement cannot be understood without examining the ideas and strategies of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi not only mobilized women in unprecedented numbers but also redefined their symbolic and practical roles within the struggle against colonial rule. His approach combined traditional notions of feminity such as sacrifice, purity, and moral strength, with modern political participation, creating a unique form of gendered nationalism. Gandhi's ideas on women were rooted in a combination of Hindu ethical traditions, Victorian morality, personal experiences and political pragmatism. He believed that women possessed inherent qualities such as ahimsa (non-violence), patience and endurance and moral superiority over men. According to Gandhi, these qualities made women naturally suited for Satyagraha (non-violent resistance). Gandhi used everyday practices to create powerful political symbols. The **Charkha** (spinning wheel) became a central symbol of the nationalist movement. Women spinning khadi represented economic self-reliance, resistance to British industrial goods, and participation in nation-building from within the household.

Gandhi's leadership opened doors for large-scale participation of women in politics. Women actively participated in Non-cooperation Movement,Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement. Women led protests and marches, picketed liquor and foreign cloth shops, courted arrest and spread nationalist messages. Prominent figures included Sarojini Naidu, Kasturba Gandhi, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Usha Mehta. In the realm of political leadership and governance, Aruna Asaf Ali became a prominent face of the Quit India Movement by hoisting the Congress flag in 1942, while Usha Mehta contributed through underground radio broadcasting that sustained nationalist communication networks.

Gandhi elevated suffering (tapasya) into a political tool. Before Gandhi, women's roles were largely confined to the domestic sphere. Gandhis's movement brought women into public political life, yet allowed them to retain traditional identities. Gandhi's approach to women was progressive yet limited. It emphasized traditional roles like motherhood and reinforced ideals of purity, sacrifice, and obedience. It also did not fully support women's independence in all spheres. Historians like Tanika Sarkar argue that Gandhian politics empowered women without dismantling patriarchy.

Women played a crucial and transformative role in the Indian National Movement. They not only supported male leaders but also led protests, organized

resistance, mobilized masses, and even took up arms. Their participation challenged both colonial rule and social restrictions, helping shape modern India.

Growth of Extremist Women in Indian Politics

Manmohan Kaur in her book *Role of Women in the Freedom Movement* by shifts the focus from Gandhian mass participation to the often-overlooked sphere of revolutionary nationalism. In this chapter, Kaur traces the emergence of women in militant politics to the early twentieth century, particularly in the aftermath of the 1905 Partition of Bengal, which intensified anti-colonial sentiments and fostered revolutionary organizations like the Anushilan Samiti and Jugantar. She argues that women initially entered these movements in supportive roles such as couriers, informants, and providers of shelter but gradually evolved into active participants in armed resistance. Revolutionary nationalism saw the emergence of militant women such as Kalpana Dutta, Pritilata Waddedar and Bina Das, who were associated with the Chittagong Armoury Raid and directly confronted British authority through armed struggle. They were directly engaged in assassination attempts, attacks on colonial institutions, and underground activities Kaur highlights that this radicalization was driven by multiple factors, including nationalist awakening, exposure to education, dissatisfaction with moderate politics, and the repressive measures of the British government. Participation in extremist politics enabled women to break traditional gender norms, challenging the notions of domesticity and passivity, and redefining themselves as courageous political actors. Kaur acknowledges certain limitations, noting that such participation was largely confined to educated, urban women and remained geographically concentrated in regions like Bengal. But eventually we find that women were not merely followers of non-violent movements led by Mahatma Gandhi, but were also deeply involved in militant resistance, thereby broadening our understanding of both the freedom struggle and the role of women within it.

Let us have an overview of some of the women leaders who fought during the Indian National Movement.

The Indian National Movement witnessed the active participation of numerous women leaders who played crucial roles in political mobilization, and revolutionary activities, thereby challenging traditional gender norms within a colonial context. Notable among them were

Sarojini Naidu, known as the *"Nightingale of India"*, took active part in the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement. She was the first Indian woman to become President of the Indian National Congress. She advocated women's rights and Hindu-Muslim unity.Annie Besant, was the leader of the Home Rule Movement and the first woman president of the Indian National Congress (1917). She promoted education and self-governance.Aruna Asaf Ali, was known as the *"Heroine of 1942"*. She hoisted the Congress flag during the Quit India Movement and was active in underground resistance.Usha Mehta, organized the Secret Congress Radio during the Quit India Movement and spread messages to mobilize people against British rule.Kasturba Gandhi, was the wife of Mahatma Gandhi. She participated in non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements and worked for social reform and women empowerment.Kamala Nehru, was the wife of Jawaharlal Nehru. She actively participated in protests and encouraged women's participation and played a key role in

the Civil Disobedience Movement.Begum Rokeya, was the pioneer of women's education and empowerment. She founded schools for Muslim girls and advocated gender equality through writings.Matangini Hazra, participated in the Quit India Movement and was martyred while carrying the national flag during protests.Sucheta Kripalani, actively took part in the Quit India Movement and later became the first woman Chief Minister of an Indian state (Uttar Pradesh).Savitribai Phule, was one of the pioneers of women's education in India. She opened the first school for girls in India and fought against caste and gender discrimination.Some Prominent Assamese Women fighters were

Chandraprabha Saikiani actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. She founded the Assam Mahila Samiti (1926), which became a major platform for women's political mobilization. She travelled extensively across rural Assam, spreading nationalist ideas among women. She fought against social evils like caste discrimination and gender inequality alongside anti-colonial struggle. Kanaklata Barua was a young martyr of the Quit India Movement. She led a procession carrying the national flag to a police station. She was shot dead by British police at just 17 years old. She became a symbol of youth bravery and sacrifice in Assam.Bhogeswari Phukanani took part in protests during the Quit India Movement. She led a procession holding the national flag. She was shot by British forces while confronting them during a demonstration.Pushpalata Das participated in both Civil Disobedience and Quit India movements. She was imprisoned multiple times for anti-British activities. She later became a member of the Constituent Assembly of India.Amolprava Das worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi. She promoted khadi and self-reliance in Assam and participated in nationalist movements and upliftment of rural communities.Hemalata Deviwas involved in early nationalist and reform movements. She encouraged women's education and social participation and helped mobilize women in political activities during the freedom struggle.Nalini Bala Devi contributed through cultural nationalism. She used literature and poetry to inspire patriotic feelings and promoted Assamese identity and resistance through writings.Rani Gaidinliuled an armed resistance against British rule in the Naga Hills. Through the Heraka movement, she emphasized the revival of indigenous Naga religious practices and resisted the cultural impact of Christian missionary activities. Imprisoned by the British from 1932 to 1947, she became a symbol of sacrifice and resistance.

Historically, these women's contributions demonstrate that the Indian National Movement was not solely a male-dominated struggle but a broad-based movement in which women engaged as leaders, revolutionaries, organizers, and symbols of resistance. Their participation not only strengthened the anti-colonial struggle but also redefined women's public roles, laying the groundwork for later debates on gender equality in independent India. The study of nationalism and gender in the Indian context reveals that the anti-colonial movement was not merely a political struggle against British rule but also a deeply gendered process of social and cultural transformation. The relationship between nationalism and gender in India reveals that the nation has never been a gender-neutral construct but one deeply shaped by historically specific ideas of masculinity and femininity. From the colonial period onward, nationalist discourse reconfigured gender roles in response to imperial critiques, producing ideals of militant masculinity alongside symbolic representations of the nation as a feminine entity. Women occupied a complex and often contradictory

position within this framework: they were venerated as embodiments of cultural purity and national honor, yet also mobilized as active participants, whether as political workers, reformers, or even militant actors within nationalist movements. However, this participation was frequently mediated through socially sanctioned roles such as motherhood or moral guardianship, thereby reinforcing rather than dismantling patriarchal structures. The historical trajectory of Indian nationalism thus demonstrates that while gender provided a powerful idiom for political mobilization, it also imposed limits on the nature of women's agency. Gender thus functioned as both a site of resistance and regulation, shaping the ways in which the nation was imagined, represented, and mobilized. A critical understanding of nationalism in India, therefore, requires attention to these gendered dynamics, which continue to shape political identities, cultural narratives, and debates on citizenship in contemporary India.

5.5 MEMORY AND IDENTITY

Nations are sustained through collective memories that celebrate particular heroes, wars, revolutions, and cultural traditions while marginalizing others. These memories are themselves gendered.Official histories frequently commemorate male soldiers, political leaders, and national founders, whereas women's contributions remain less visible or are remembered mainly in maternal or symbolic roles. Such selective remembrance shapes collective identity by reinforcing particular understandings of masculinity, femininity, patriotism, and citizenship.

Women's citizenship has been historically shaped by the intertwined forces of colonialism, nationalism, and patriarchy. The British colonial rulers and orthodox nationalist leaders employed the language of motherhood to define women's place in society, reducing them primarily to symbols of the nation rather than recognizing them as equal citizens with independent rights. While colonial discourse portrayed Indian women as oppressed victims needing rescue, nationalist discourse responded by glorifying women as "Mother India"(Bharat Mata) and custodians of the nation's culture. Despite appearing contradictory, both frameworks reinforced patriarchal control over women's bodies, sexuality, and reproductive roles.

Kumar (2026) argues that Indian feminist literature challenges dominant nationalist histories by recovering women's memories that have long been excluded from official accounts of the nation. He contends that conventional histories privilege political events, wars, and male leaders, while overlooking women's experiences of violence, displacement, domestic loss, and emotional trauma. Feminist writers therefore use memory not merely as personal recollection but as a political act that contests national amnesia and exposes the gendered silences embedded in historical narratives.

Women's memories of events such as Partition, communal violence, migration, and social conflict reveal alternative understandings of history that differ from state-sponsored narratives of national unity and progress. Rather than portraying women as passive victims or symbolic figures, feminist literature presents them as active witnesses whose fragmented memories, silences, and testimonies reshape collective understandings of identity and belonging. By foregrounding everyday experiences and

private suffering, these narratives transform memory into a form of resistance against patriarchal and nationalist representations of history.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.1: Define the concept of the "new woman" in the context of Indian nationalism.
Q.2: How did colonial rule influence the construction of masculinity in India?
Q.3: What is meant by gender identity in the colonial Indian context?
Q.4: Explain the idea of the 'inner' and 'outer' domains in nationalist thought.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

- Nationalism in colonial India was deeply gendered, with colonial rule and Indian nationalist movements shaping distinct ideas of masculinity, femininity, and sexuality.
- Women's roles evolved from symbols of the nation to active participants in the freedom struggle. However, their participation was frequently framed within ideals of motherhood, sacrifice, and moral purity rather than complete gender equality.
- Nationalist discourse constructed gendered ideals through sexuality and masculinity. Women's sexuality was closely linked to family honour and national identity, while Indian masculinity was reshaped in response to colonial stereotypes of effeminacy by emphasizing physical strength, discipline, celibacy, and moral courage. These gendered ideals became central to imagining the Indian nation.
- The nation was represented through powerful feminine symbols such as Bharat Mata, while women like Sarojini Naidu, Aruna Asaf Ali, Kalpana Dutta, Kanaklata Barua, and many others actively contributed to both non-violent and revolutionary nationalist movements. Their participation challenged traditional gender norms even though nationalist politics often continued to operate within patriarchal frameworks.
- Memory and identity are central to understanding gender and nationalism. Official nationalist histories have largely celebrated male heroes while marginalizing women's contributions or remembering them primarily as mothers and symbols of the nation.

5.8 FURTHER READING

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✓5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: The concept of the "new woman" emerged during the Indian nationalist movement as an ideal of educated, morally pure, self-disciplined, and culturally rooted womanhood.

Ans to Q2: Colonial rule significantly shaped the construction of masculinity in India by portraying Indian men as weak, effeminate, and incapable of self-rule.

Ans to Q3: In the colonial Indian context, gender identity refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, expectations, and responsibilities assigned to

men and women. These identities were shaped through the interaction of traditional Indian social structures, British colonial ideologies, social reform movements, and nationalist politics.

Ans to Q4: According to Partha Chatterjee, Indian nationalism divided society into two distinct spheres: the outer domain and the inner domain**.** The outer domain consisted of politics, the economy, science, administration, and other material aspects of life that were influenced by Western modernity and largely occupied by men. The inner domain included the home, family, religion, and culture, which nationalists considered the spiritual essence of the nation.

⑦ 5. 9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q.1: What role did the image of Bharat Mata play in Indian nationalism?

Q.2: How did Mahatma Gandhi mobilize women in the national movement?

Q.3: Discuss the relationship between nationalism and gender in colonial India. How did colonial discourse and nationalist responses shape ideas of masculinity and femininity?

Q.4: Examine the role of women in the Indian National Movement. How did their participation challenge traditional gender roles while also reinforcing certain patriarchal norms?

Q.5: Analyze the role of culture, art, and ideology in shaping gendered nationalism in India, with special reference to concepts such as Bharat Mata, the ‘new woman’, and Gandhian thought on women and sexuality.

UNIT 6: NATIONALISM IN EUROPE- I

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objective
6.2 Introduction
6.3 Intellectual Origin
6.4 The Treaty of Westphalia and Europe
6.5 Napoleon and Nationalism
6.6 Let us sum up
6.7 Further Reading
6.8 Answers to check your progress
6.9 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- Analyse the intellectual origin and philosophical foundations of early European nationalist thought.
- Understand how the Treaty of Westphalia shaped the modern concept of state sovereignty and territorial border.
- Know the role of Napoleon in spreading nationalist ideals and provoking national resistance across the continent.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

The concept of the nation-state did not emerge overnight, rather it was the result of a gradual transformation in the way people understood power, authority, and collective identity. Over time, traditional loyalties to monarchs, dynasties, and religious institutions gave way to a growing sense of belonging to a nation. By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, nationalism had emerged as a powerful force in Europe, transforming political institutions, reshaping territorial boundaries, and inspiring movements for national unity and self-determination.

The rise of nationalism was the result of both intellectual and political developments. Enlightenment and Romantic thinkers provided its ideological foundations, while events such as the Treaty of Westphalia, the French Revolution, and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte created conditions for its growth and spread across Europe. These developments gradually weakened traditional loyalties to monarchs and empires and strengthened the idea of the nation as the basis of political identity.

This unit discusses the intellectual origins of nationalism in Europe, the significance of the Treaty of Westphalia in shaping the modern state system, and the role of Napoleon in the spread of nationalist ideas.

6.3 INTELLECTUAL ORIGIN

The intellectual origins of nationalism in Europe were rooted in enlightenment thought, romantic philosophy and the practical application of ideas during the French Revolution which emphasised popular sovereignty and shared identity.For centuries, a person's identity was tied to their religion or the king they served. People were subjects meaning they were essentially the property of a monarch. However, during the 17th and 18th century, a new wave of thinking often called the Enlightenment began to challenge the old loyalties. The intellectual origin of nationalism began when enlightenment thinkers started to argue that the state belongs to the people, not the ruler.

John Locke, 17th century philosopher was one of the first to argue against "Divine Rights of kings" , the idea that God chose the king . He believed that a country is a Social Contract made by its citizens and every individual is born with natural rights - specifically life, liberty and property. He argued that if a ruler violates the natural rights of the people, the people have a duty to overthrow them. In the context of nationalism Locke's core contribution is the shift from being subject of a ruler to being citizens of the state.

Jean Jacques Rousseau ,18th century philosopher was one among the illustrious enlightenment writers whose political and philosophical ideas shaped the French Revolution. His book 'Social Contract' redefined the nation as a collective body governed by the General will, shifting political legitimacy from the monarch to the citizen. His idea that the people are the true source of power is the foundation of the modern nation.

While Enlightenment focused on logic, universal laws and the Social contract that treated all citizens the same. In response to this, Romantic nationalism reaction turned towards history, language and emotion to find a sense of belonging. It was an intellectual and artistic movement of the late 18th and early 19th century.

Johann Gottfried von Herder is the most vital figure, as he introduced the concept of Volksgeist, or the spirit of the people. He believed that a true nation is found in the common people's folk songs, unique traditions and the native language was the most sacred bond of a nation.Nationalism shifted from being political choice to an emotional identity that the person is born with. Johann Gottlied Fichte was another philosopher, who took Herder's cultural ideas and made them militant and political.He argued that a nation is defined by its shared language and culture, rather than just political borders, which became a cornerstone of Romantic nationalism.

By the late 17th century, the intellectual seed of nationalism had been planted. The thinkers of Enlightenment and Romanticism argued that the true heart of a country wasn't found in the crown but in a shared language and collective will of the people. However, prior to the mid-17th century, the political world was a chaotic web of overlapping loyalties rather than a collection of clear cut countries. For a collection of

people to function as a nation, they required more than just a shared culture, they needed a world that recognised clear borders and independent authority. This transition from shared identity to a recognised territory was forced by the sheer exhaustion of the Thirty Years War, leading to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648).

6.4 THE TREATY OF WESTPHALIA AND EUROPE

The Treaty of Westphalia was signed in 1648 and marked the end of the long and destructive Thirty Years' War in Europe(1618-1648). This war began mainly because of religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in the Holy Roman Empire, but over time many European powers became involved like Spain, France,etc. The war caused massive destruction, economic decline and population loss, particularly in German territories.

As the conflict dragged on, it became clear that a comprehensive settlement was necessary to restore stability across Europe. By the 1640s, all parties recognised the need for peace, which led to diplomatic negotiations in the cities of Munster and Osnabruck. The Treaty of Westphalia was a series of peace agreements signed in 1648 that brought an end to the devastating Thirty Years War.

The Treaty changed how the world works by creating the modern idea of a country. Before this, kings and religious leaders often fought over who owned what land or what religion people had to follow. One of the most important principles was statesovereignty. The treaty recognized the right of each state to govern its territory without external interference. This meant that rulers had authority over domestic affairs, including religion and administration, within their own borders. By recognizing the independence of states within the empire and confirming their right to conduct their own foreign policies, the treaty marked a shift toward a system of politically autonomous states.

Another important principle was territorial integrity. The treaty acknowledged the importance of clearly defined territorial boundaries and the right of rulers to exercise authority within those borders. This contributed to the gradual consolidation of centralized states and the decline of the feudal political structure that had dominated medieval Europe. It also strengthened the idea that political authority should be linked to a specific territory and population.It turned Europe into a collection of independent states rather than one giant empire ruled by a single leader or church. The treaty moved Europe toward a system where political authority was tied to fixed geographic boundaries rather than personal or religious allegiances.Another feature of the treaty was the acceptance of religious co-existence.

Although the concept of modern nationalism had not yet fully developed in the seventeenth century, the Treaty of Westphalia played a crucial role in shaping the political environment in which nationalism later emerged. By emphasising the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states, the treaty laid the groundwork for the formation of nation states in Europe.

6.5 NAPOLEON AND NATIONALISM

The emergence of nationalism in Europe during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was closely connected with the political upheavals that followed the French Revolution. Among the key figures who influenced this process was Napoleon Bonaparte, whose rise to power transformed both France and much of the European continent.

The French Revolution (1789) marked a turning point in European history. Before the revolution, France was ruled by an absolute monarchy under Louis XVI, and society was divided into unequal estates where the clergy and nobility enjoyed privileges while the common people carried most of the tax burden. Economic crisis, rising food prices, and growing dissatisfaction with political inequality led to widespread unrest.The revolution began with demands for political representation and quickly developed into a movement aimed at ending feudal privileges and establishing principles such as liberty, equality, and fraternity. Revolutionary leaders introduced new ideas about citizenship and the rights of the people. Symbols like the national flag, national anthem, and the concept of a citizen army helped create a stronger sense of national identity in France.

The transition from monarchy to a new political system was marked by conflict, uncertainty, and repeated changes in government. The French Revolution brought major changes in France, including the creation of the National Assembly and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which gave people rights like liberty, equality, and political representation.Political instability was widespread, rival groups within the revolution, like the Jacobins and Girondins, fought for power, leading to violence, especially during the Reign of Terror (1793–1794), when thousands were executed as enemies of the revolution. At the same time, France faced economic problems such as rising prices, food shortages, and unemployment. The country was also fighting wars with European monarchies that opposed the revolution, which further weakened the government.The later government, the French Directory (1795–1799), was corrupt and unable to control the unrest.

After the instability that followed the French Revolution, Napoleon emerged as a powerful military leader. In 1799 he seized political authority in France and later declared himself Emperor in 1804. Through military campaigns, Napoleon extended French influence across neighbouring European regions by removing existing dynasties and establishing new kingdoms ruled by members of his own family .During his rule, Napoleon introduced a number of administrative and legal reforms that reflected some of the revolutionary principles such as the abolition of feudal privileges . One of the most influential reforms introduced by Napoleon was the Napoleonic Code. The Napoleonic code of 1804 was a civil law system that simplified and unified French laws.It guaranteed equality before the law, protected private property, and regulated family matters like marriage and inheritance. By removing feudal privileges, it made laws fairer and easier to follow. The Code also influenced many European countries, spreading ideas of justice, secular law, and individual rights.

However, French domination also created resentment among the populations of conquered territories. French authorities often imposed heavy taxes, enforced military

conscription and prioritised the interest of the French empire. Initially, Napoleon was seen as a liberator who would bring freedom for the people but soon Napoleonic armies came to be viewed everywhere as an invading force. As a result, people in several European regions began to resist French control. He was finally defeated at the battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Many scholars argue that Napoleon Bonaparte did not aim to spread nationalism outside France, his main objective was to expand French imperial power after the French Revolution. Historians such as Eric Hobsbawm and Hans Kohn have argued that the expansion of Napoleon Bonaparte unintentionally encouraged the growth of nationalist movements in several parts of Europe.

Napoleon's rule had a paradoxical impact on nationalism in Europe. On the one hand, his reforms weakened traditional feudal structures and introduced ideas of legal equality and centralized administration. On the other hand, the experience of foreign domination encouraged people in many regions to unite around shared cultural, linguistic, and historical identities.This dual process of legal modernization and collective resistance forced Europeans to define themselves by their shared culture and language, transforming the struggle for independence into a powerful movement for national identity.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: In which two cities were the diplomatic negotiations held?

Q2: What were the two main religious groups whose conflict sparked the Thirty Years War?

Q3: In which year did Napoleon declare himself Emperor?

6.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, we have learnt that-

- The Enlightenment shifted power from kings to the people. Thinkers like Rousseau introduced popular sovereignty, defining the "nation" as a community of citizens with shared rights.
- Napoleon's conquests spread revolutionary ideals like equality and unified laws across Europe.
- Growth of nationalism in Europe while fighting against French rule.

6.7 FURTHER READING

1. National Council of Educational Research and Training.(2024). *India and the contemporary world -I Textbook in history for class* IX.ncert.nic.in
2. Hobsbawn,E.J.(1962).*The age of revolution:1789-1848.* Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
3. Timothy,B.(1998). *Nationalism in Europe, 1789-1945.* Routledge
4. Anderson, B.(2006).*Imagined Communities:Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*Verso.

✓ 6.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q.1: Munster and Osnabruck

Ans to Q.2: Religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics

Ansto Q.3: 1804

? 6.9 MODEL QUESTION

1. Explain the intellectual origin of nationalism in Europe.
2. Discuss the significance of Treaty of Westphalia in the development of modern nation states .
3. Describe the administrative and legal reforms introduced by Napoleon Bonaparte.
4. Evaluate the role of Napoleon Bonaparte in spreading nationalist ideas across Europe.
5. Examine the relationship between the enlightenment, the French Revolution and the rise of nationalism in Europe.
6. Discuss how Napoleonic reforms contributed both to the spread and resistance of nationalism in Europe.

UNIT 7: NATIONALISM IN EUROPE – II

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Imperialism

7.4 World Wars and Fascism

7.5 Post-War Europe and Nationalism

7.6 Let Us Sum Up

7.7 Further Readings

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.9 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to-

- develop comprehensive understanding of the transformation of nationalism in Europe from a liberal-democratic force to authoritarian forms
- analyse the relationship between nationalism and imperialism, particularly its connections with capitalism and global rivalries
- explore and critically evaluate the role of nationalism in the outbreak of the First and Second World Wars and its culmination in fascist regimes
- examine the reconfiguration of nationalism in post-war Europe, including its links with Cold War ideological divisions

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Eric Hobsbawm, the renowned historian once wrote to one of his left-wing friends in 1988 'I remain in the curious position of disliking, distrusting, disapproving, and fearing nationalism wherever it exists …butrecognising its enormous force … some things can be achieved by mobilising nationalist feelings . . . However, I cannot be a nationalist …' (Hobsbawm, 2021).

Hobsbawm's anti-nationalistposition, as captured in the quote,is not surprising. Born in 1917, he grew up in interwar Europe, experiencing the collapse of empires, the rise of fascism, and the devastation of World War II firsthand. He nevertheless acknowledged its enormous force, capable of mobilising peoples and even contributing to progress. This was visible in the first half of the 19th century, when nationalism was animated by Enlightenment, Romantic and liberal ideals. However, his distrust and cynicism were rooted in the imperialist, authoritarian, and aggressive avatars of nationalism that emerged in late 19th-century Europe. This Unit will explore precisely those aspects of nationalism that made thinkers like Hobsbawm critical of it. In other words, in Unit VII we examine how nationalism became increasingly entangled with

imperialism, militarism, and authoritarian ideologies such as fascism, culminating in the two World Wars and later shaping the persistent arms race of the Cold War era.

7.3 IMPERIALISM

The history of imperialism is as old as the history of empires. Imperialist adventures from the very ancient times resulted in the formations of ancient empires such as Macedonia, Rome, Persia, and China.The medieval formations like the Arab Caliphates, the Byzantine Empire, and the Mongol dominions, also came out as imperialist conquests over various parts of the world. Imperialism got a new direction in the waning decades of the 19th century when nationalism lost its liberal-democratic zeal for self-determination. It turned into a more divisive belief that encouraged tension and set the stage for disputes. Hannah Arendt observed that imperialism seemed to give nationalism "a new lease on life," masking domestic tensions with the promise of unity abroad.(Ardent: 1945). Major European powers, turned into nation-states, deftly exploited the nationalist aspirations among people to augment their imperialist designs.

- **Meaning of Imperialism**

'Imperialism' – derived from the Latin word *imperium* – means "to command," "to be sovereign," or simply "to rule." The Encyclopaedia Britanica defines imperialism as state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas. However, the very word *imperialism* was coined in the 19th century to denounce Napoleon III's despotic militarism and his attempts to gain political support through foreign military interventions.

- **Definitions of Imperialism**

Considering its diverse connotations over time, each scholarly tradition defined imperialism through its own lens – whethereconomic, political, strategic, cultural, or moral – making it a complicated subject. Norman D. Palmer and Howard C. Perkins, for example, note that "Imperialism can be discussed, denounced, defended, and died for, but it cannot be defined in any generally acceptable way." Moritz Julius Bonn described it as "a policy which aims at creating, organising and maintaining an empire; that is, a state of vast size composed of various more or less distinct national units and subject to a single centralized will."For Charles A. Beard, "Imperialism is the employment of the engines of government and diplomacy to acquire territories, protectorates, and/or spheres of influence occupied usually by other races or peoples, and to promote industrial, trade, and investment opportunities." Marxist scholar V.I. Lenin (1917) viewed the new imperialism as a distinct stage of capitalism, characterized by a nuanced form of economic development, which he defined as "highest stage of capitalism."

Michael Doyle argues in *Empires* (1986), that the pre-modern imperialisms were typically about extracting tribute, securing territorial control, and sustaining military hegemony, rather than the capitalist economic integration that defined later imperialism. More recently, Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper in *Empires in World History* (2010) have highlighted the continuities across centuries, showing that empires have always sought to organise diversity through coercion and hierarchy.From Rome

and Persia to the Mongols and the Ottomans, empires have always been political orders in which one state or people dominated others, imposing hierarchy rather than equality. Such imperialism depends on territorial domination and military strength.

- **Nationalism and Imperialism**

"I would annex the planets if I could!" – Cecil Rhodes

"I do not want to miss a good chance of getting us a slice of this magnificent African cake." – Leopold II

In the late nineteenth-century Europe, nationalism shifted from its liberal ideals to an aggressive, expansionist force closely tied to imperialism. Figures like Cecil Rhodes, an influential British businessman (1853–1902), and Leopold II, the monarch of Belgium(1835–1909), actively propagated this new age of imperialism. Their ambitions reflected how economic interests and royal power combined to justify colonial expansion. Emerging from earlier nationalist movements such as the unifications of Germany and Italy, this transformed nationalism fostered intense competition among nation-states, turning expansion into a central goal of national policy.They believed, as WilhelmHuebbe-Schleiden put it,"patriotism in overseas possession is best carried out through money-making." (as cited in Arendt: 1945). Rhodes went a step further and said that the national flag itself was "a commercial asset." J.A. Hobson argued that imperialism was driven by the glut of surplus capital: capitalists, facing limited opportunities at home, pushed their governments to open colonies for cheap raw materials, labour, and markets. He famously called this "the economic taproot of imperialism." V. I. Lenin took Hobson's economic critique to place imperialism at the very centre of Marxist theory. Writing during the First World War, Lenin argued in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) that imperialism was not simply a matter of policy or elite choice but the inevitable outcome of capitalist development itself. He defined it as "the monopoly stage of capitalism."

This imperial-nationalist drive was extended to the overseas withrapid colonial expansion. Colonies became symbols of prestige whichadded to the competitive and climate.The "Scramble for Africa" after the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 formalised these tensions, as Britain, France, Germany, and Belgium competed to dominate territories. Confrontations such as the "Fashoda Incident" of 1898, where Britain and France nearly went to war over control of the Nile Valley, revealed how overseas claims directly contributed to the national rivalry.Within Europe,Bulgaria's nationalist drive to merge with Eastern Rumelia resulted in Bulgarian Unification of 1885 but ultimately escalated regional conflicts which European powers exploited to advance their imperial interests in the Balkans. European powers pushed their colonial agendas in the name of 'national wealth' and 'national mission' – an idea that finds instant gratification in the so-called moral superiority of the European races. The intertwining of nationalist ambition, imperial expansion, and overseas colonial rivalries generated a climate ofglobal conflict

[**Let Us Know: The Berlin Conference (1884-85)**: The Berlin Conference was a meeting of European powers that divided Africa among themselves without consulting African societies. It marked the height of imperialist rivalry and showed how nationalism and empire-building worked together.]

7.4 WORLD WARS AND FASCISM

"Only fascism, the uncompromising enemy of Western civilization, has pushed nationalism to its very limit, to a totalitarian nationalism, in which humanity and the individual disappear and nothing remains but the nationality, which has become the one and the whole"

— Hans Kohn

Hans Kohn's captivating quote, cited above, captures the extreme transformation of nationalism into a totalitarian force under fascism, which he describes as the "uncompromising enemy of Western civilization." This radical nationalismreached its zenith in the interwar period following World War I (1914-1918).However, this transformation can be traced back to the late 19th century, when imperial rivalries and ethnic tensions in Europe intensified nationalist sentiments. After the war, authoritarian regimes of Germany and Italy, further radicalized nationalism into the fascist ideology that subordinated individuals and humanity to the nation-state. This aggressive ideology drove the conflicts that ignited World War II (1939-1945). These wars exacted an unimaginable human cost: World War I resulted in approximately 20 million deaths (including 9–11 million military personnel and 7-13 million civilians), while World War II claimed 70-85 million lives (around 21-25 million military and 50-55 million civilians), representing about 3% of the world's population at the time.

The twentieth century is almost unimaginable without the First and Second World Wars. Together, they shaped the first half of the century, dividing it into distinct phases marked as "pre-war" and "inter-war" periods. Yet the language of "world war" was not axiomatic. Different countries described the conflict of 1914-18 in different ways, and it was only during the 1940s that a broader consensus emerged around the label "world war." Interestingly, the term "First World War" was coined as early as September 1914 by the German biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel, who predicted that "there is no doubt that the course and character of the feared 'European War' … will become the first world war in the full sense of the word." Still, the terminology took decades to settle: in Britain, it was not until 1948 that the government formally decided it had fought a "Second World War." In a conceptual sense, therefore, the very category of the "First World War" was retrospectively created by the experience of the Second, which gave meaning and sequence to both. Between these two catastrophes, the rise of fascism offered a radicalized nationalism that thrived on war, exclusion, and authoritarianism. In this sub-unit, we will explore the two World Wars and the rise of fascism – togetherconstituting one of the darkest chapters in European history.

- **The First World War**

Nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries became more than just a unifying force. It became potent, it became powerful and often manifested in aggressive and intolerant ideological forms. This transformation, especially evident after 1880, marked a departure from earlier 'threshold principles', guidelines that restricted self-determination claims to groups with a strong historical background, cultural unity and political readiness deemed worthy of forming their own state. These principles were idealized in an edifice called'Every nation a state' – an epitome of romanticismof theItalian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini (1830s–1870s). These principles, as Eric

Hobsbawm observes, limited statehood to entities like Germany and Italy where historical, cultural, and political unity was effectively projected. However, by the preceding decades of the First World War saw nationalism abandoning this restraint. It allowed any group of people identifying as a 'nation' – eventhose without deep historical roots – todemand sovereignty, mostly based on ethnic or linguistic criteria.

The democratization of nation hoodon ethnic, linguistic, or cultural linesnurtured intolerance, rivalry, and aggression, with its loudest presence in the Balkans. But what does it mean to claim a nation in a land as diverse as the Balkans? After the unifications of Italy (1861) and Germany (1871), fresh nationalist waves spread eastward, destabilizing this Ottoman-controlled, multi-ethnic region. The Balkans, encompassing what we now call Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia, and Montenegro was geographically and ethnically diverse. It entered a phase of ethnic nationalism which meant shared language, heritage, folklore, and cultural roots becoming idioms of identities among groups like Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, Albanians, and others. Each claim to nationality was nourished by history and the memory of lost homelands, within the Balkans – aland of layered diversities where the borders of nationhood overlapped, blurred, and often collided. The Ottoman Empire, which for centuries had ruled the region through the *millet* system – organizing communities by religion rather than ethnicity – founditself increasingly unable to contain the rise of modern ethnic nationalisms that demanded political independence and territorial realignment.

What happens when such ethnic ambitions encounter the *new imperialism* of powerful nation-states? For Austria-Hungary, nationalism meant suppressing Slavic unrest in Bosnia-Herzegovina to hold its fragile empire together. For Russia, it meant wielding Pan-Slavism as a weapon to expand southward, claiming to protect Orthodox Christians. Both clashed directly with the aspirations of Balkan peoples. The collision of these two forces, ethnic nationalism from below and imperial nationalism from above, turned the Balkans into Europe's volatile region. From the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–78 to Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908, every settlement left new grievances. The struggle to define 'whose nation?' was no longer local but became a contest of empires, and in that contest, the seeds of the Great War were sown.

The disturbances in the Balkan region before the First World War were driven by coalitions of Balkan ethnic nationalisms and the imperial ambitions of the great powers, most clearly seen in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913. In the first war, Serbia, Greece, Bulgaria, and Montenegro formed the Balkan League in 1912 to expel Ottoman power from the region. Austria-Hungary pressured the Ottomans diplomatically and militarily to limit Serbia's growth, while Russia gave the Balkan League funds, advisors, and support to promote Pan-Slavism. In the Second Balkan War, these allies fought over territory. Great powers intervened: Austria-Hungary backed Albania's creation to block Serbia's access to Adriatic Sea; Russia supported Serbia to counter Austria-Hungary; Germany aided Austria-Hungary to limit Russia's imperial objectives; Italy helped create Albania to secure its Adriatic interests and curb the influence of Greece. Thus, the Balkan Wars were not only conflicts of ethnic nationalism but also proxy arenas of imperial rivalry, leaving the region deeply unstable and volatile on the eve of the Great War.

Austria-Hungary's Pig War (1906–1909), termed "pig politics," initiated a tariff conflict with Serbia. By restricting Serbia's critical pig exports through Adriatic ports, it added to the intensification of Balkan tensions. This economic policy, designed to constrain Serbian autonomy, compounded grievances from Austria's 1908 annexationof Bosnia and Herzegovina which were predominantly inhabited by ethnic Serbs. These actions galvanized Serbian nationalism towards a militant form to unify South Slavic state. Consequently, the Black Hand, a clandestine Serbian nationalist group, was formed to challenge Austrian authority through the acts of terror and violence. On June 28, 1914, Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian Serb affiliated with the Black Hand, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo. Holding Serbia responsible, Austria-Hungary issued a harsh ultimatum, which Serbia failed to completely accept. On July 28, Austria declared war. It resulted into the outbreak of the First World War.

But how did a bilateral conflict between Austria and Serbia cause the First World War? The answer lies in the system of secret alliances that had divided Europe. This network was largely due to the foreign policy of Otto von Bismarck, the architect of Germany's unification. After Germany's unification in 1871 and the Franco-Prussian War, Bismark sought to safeguard the new empire by diplomatically isolating France and preserving the balance of power. His diplomacy produced the Dual Alliance with Austria-Hungary in 1879. With Italy in it, this pact expanded into the Triple Alliance in 1882. On the other hand, France, determined to break its isolation, forged an alliance with Russia in 1891, creating the Dual Entente. Britain gave up its policy of "splendid isolation" in response to German naval expansion and imperial ambitions as it moved closer to France by an alliance system called the Entente Cordiale (1904). Later Russia joined the alliance in 1907to form the Triple Entente. Thus, by the early twentieth century, Europe was divided into two rival armed camp viz., Triple Alliance and Triple Entente who were firmly locked in a fragile "armed peace." While these alliances restrained conflict in the short term, in the long run they dragged Europe into an uneasy age of arms race.

Again, how did this so-called "armed peace" give rise to an unprecedented arms race? The term itself referred to a paradoxical situation: the great powers were technically at peace, yet their rival camps remained deeply suspicious to each other as theyengaged in constant military and naval preparation. It was evident that these alliances rested as much on military might as on diplomatic ties. The practice of maintaining large standing armed force became the new normsince the French Revolution. It was refined by Napoleon and perfected by Bismarck during the unification of Germany. Between 1871 and 1914, military expenditures of the great powersgrew more than doubledand conscription became the new normal across Europe. Germany's army grew to over 800,000 soldiers, France maintained nearly 700,000, while Russia commanded the largest standing army in the world. The atmosphere of armed peace, reinforced by militarism, ensured that the Sarajevo assassination did not remain a local crisis but instead triggered a continental inferno – drawing Germany, Russia, France, and Britain to it.

- **From Wartime Enthusiasm to the Radicalization of Nationalism**

Strikingly, the First World War was not immediately perceived as a catastrophic global conflict but rather as an extraordinary international event born of national

rivalries and charged with a powerful sense of nationalism. Crowds gathered in cities to cheer mobilization, volunteers rushed to enlist, and many believed the war would be brief, even transformative – "over by Christmas."However, this early optimism quickly collapsed as the war turned into a prolonged and brutal conflict. Millions of soldiers died in battles such as Verdun and the Somme, while entire societies were mobilized to sustain the war effort. The scale of suffering shattered the romantic ideals of nationalism that had initially inspired volunteers. Intellectuals and writers later described this generation as a "lost generation."

Yet this disillusionment did not bring an end to nationalism but reshaped and even radicalized it. Many Europeans no longer trusted liberal institutions that had led them into the catastrophe of war. As Eric Hobsbawm observed, the inter-war years witnessed "the collapse of the values and institutions of liberal civilization," creating a political vacuum in which extreme nationalist movements could gain ground.(Hobsbawm: 1995). The Treaty of Versailles, concluded in 1919, formally ended the war between the Allied Powers and Germany.However, the choice of Versailles as the site for the peace settlement was deeply historical and carried powerful symbolic and political meanings.

In January 1871, during the Franco-Prussian War, the German Empire had been proclaimed in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, marking the triumph of German unification under Prussian leadership. Nearly half a century later, the same palace was deliberately chosen by the victorious Allied powers to sign the treaty. A place that once symbolized German triumph now marked its defeat and humiliation as it imposed territorial losses, military restrictions, and heavy reparations on Germany. Resentment, however, was not limited to Germany. In Italy, despite being among the victors, many nationalists felt that the country had been denied the territorial gains promised during the war, calling it a "mutilated victory." In both Germany and Italy, these experiences of humiliation, political frustration, and economic instability strengthened demands for national regeneration and helped create support for authoritarian movements that promised to restore national pride and unity. In such a climate, nationalism did not disappear after the war but instead sought new and more militant expressions.

- **The Spectre of Fascism**

In October 1922, thousands of uniformed men known as the Blackshirts marched toward Rome, demanding that the Italian government hand power to the Fascist movement led by Benito Mussolini. The event, remembered as the March on Rome, was less a military conquest than a dramatic political spectacle. Fascist squads had already been using violence against trade unionists, socialist activists, and political opponents across Italy. Their marches, uniforms, and rituals projected an image of discipline, unity, and national strength. Faced with this growing pressure and fearing civil conflict, the Italian king eventually invited Mussolini to form the government. Within a few years, democratic institutions were dismantled and Italy became a fascist dictatorship.In September 1934, hundreds of thousands gathered in the German city of Nuremberg for a massive rally organized by the Nazi regime. Under giant flags and carefully choreographed marches, crowds chanted slogans praising the nation and their leader, Adolf Hitler. Soldiers, party members, and youth groups marched in disciplined formations while speeches celebrated German unity and national rebirth. These rallies were not merely political gatherings but powerful spectacles designed to

inspire emotional loyalty to the nation and unquestioning obedience to the leader. Such events illustrate how Nazism, often regarded as the German variant of fascism, transformed nationalism into a mass movement that rejected liberal democracy, suppressed political opposition, and sought to mobilize society under an authoritarian state in the name of national unity and racial purity.



Source: *Illustrazione/Italiana/Wikimedia Commons/Public Domain*, Beneto Mussolini and members of the National Fascist Party at the rally in Naples, Oct. 1992.

- **Meaning and Origins of Fascism**

The experiences of Italy and Germany reveal how fascism emerged as a powerful political movement in inter-war Europe. But what exactly was fascism? What happens when nationalism takes such a turn? To answer this, we must examine how nationalism evolved into a more radical political form in the inter-war years, eventually becoming an authoritarian ideology that placed the nation above the individual. This marked a new political avatar of nationalism, distinct from its earlier liberal-democratic character – anideology that came to be known as fascism. The term “fascism” derives from the Italian word *fascio*, meaning a bundle or group, and from the Latin *fasces*, a bundle of rods tied around an axe carried by officials in ancient Rome as a symbol of authority and unity.

The Fascists in Italy adopted the *fasces*, the imagery of Roman power, as their emblem.It deliberately invoked the imagery of Roman power and imperial authority. It can be observed that such ancient symbols helped fascist regimes legitimise their rule by associating it with a historically glorified national tradition. In Germany, the Nazi regime also used historical symbolism to legitimise its authority. Its most prominent emblem was the *swastika*; an ancient symbol found in many cultures long before the twentieth century. In Nazi ideology, it was symbolised as the supposed ‘Aryan’ heritage and ‘purity’ of German people. In other words, fascist regimes in both the countries used historical symbolism to strengthen nationalist sentiment andlegitimise authoritarian rule.



Source: *Keystone/Getty Images*, Adolf Hitler is addressing a formal assembly in Nazi Germany, with prominent swastika banners displayed behind him.

Fascism and Nazism did not emerge in isolation; they grew out of the profound political, economic, and social crises that followed the First World War. Across Europe, defeated economies, mass unemployment, inflation, and the disillusionment of returning soldiers created fertile ground for movements that promised national regeneration and strong leadership. In Italy, Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement capitalised on fears of socialist revolution and the frustrations of a "mutilated victory," presenting itself as a force capable of restoring order, discipline, and national pride. In Germany, Adolf Hitler's Nazi movement drew strength from resentment against the Treaty of Versailles, economic instability, and the humiliation of defeat. Both regimes transformed nationalism into a militant political doctrine, elevating militarized nationalism to new heights by glorifying war, demanding absolute loyalty to the leader, and mobilising society in the name of national revival. Once in power, fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany increasingly turned this aggressive nationalism outward, pursuing expansionist ambitions that soon pushed Europe toward another catastrophic conflict.

- **The Second World War**

The radicalization of nationalism in the inter-war period increasingly pushed Europe toward the Second World War. This new brand of nationalism, charged with militant and authoritarian force, rejected liberal democracy, and elevated its militarized version to new heights.Fascist leaders openly glorified war as a source of national strength and renewal. Benito Mussolini, in *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932), declared that "War alone brings up all human energies to their maximum tension and sets the seal of nobility on those peoples who have the courage to face it." Similarly, Adolf Hitler, in *Mein Kampf* (1925), expressed that "Those who want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live." Such ideas reflected the fascist belief that war and conquest were essential for the vitality and survival of the nation.

The conditions that allowed this transformation were largely shaped by the unsettled legacy of the First World War. The Treaty of Versailles and the wider peace settlement created new states and redrew boundaries across Europe, but it also produced deep resentment among both victors and vanquished. In Germany, the treaty

imposed territorial losses, military restrictions, and heavy reparations, creating a sense of humiliation and injustice that nationalist movements readily exploited. In Italy, despite being on the victorious side, many nationalists believed that their country had been denied the territorial rewards promised during the war. These frustrations weakened faith in liberal institutions and opened space for movements that promised national regeneration and decisive leadership.

Economic instability further intensified this crisis. The Great Depression of the early 1930s produced mass unemployment, social unrest, and widespread disillusionment with parliamentary politics. In such conditions, fascist movements presented themselves as forces capable of restoring order, discipline, and national pride. In Italy, Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime mobilized paramilitary squads and nationalist propaganda to consolidate power and project an image of unity and strength. In Germany, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party capitalized on resentment against the Versailles settlement and the hardships of economic collapse, promising to rebuild the nation and overturn the humiliations imposed after the war.

Once in power, fascist and Nazi regimes transformed nationalist ideology into a programme of expansion. In Germany, Hitler's doctrine of *Lebensraum* justified the expansion of German territory in Eastern Europe as essential for the survival and growth of the German nation. In Italy, Mussolini pursued ambitions of reviving the prestige of a modern Roman Empire, seeking to establish Italian dominance across the Mediterranean and Africa. National greatness, in both regimes, was closely linked to military strength and territorial expansion.

These ambitions soon began to undermine the fragile international order established after the First World War. Italy invaded of Ethiopia in 1935. Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in 1936, annexed Austria in 1938 (*Anschluss*), and demanded the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia. European powers, in their attempt to avoid another devastating conflict, followed a policy of appeasement. However, in the long run, it provoked resistance and counter-alliances among other powers which ended up dividing the world into national rivalries within Europe and beyond. The crisis reached its breaking point on 1 September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. Britain and France soon declared war on Germany, transforming what had begun as regional aggression into a global conflict. Soon the national rivalries finally consolidated into two opposing camps: the Axis Powers led by Adolf Hitler's Germany, Benito Mussolini's Italy, and imperial Japan on one side, and the Allied Powers including Britain, the Soviet Union, the United States, China, and several other countries on the other.

The Second World War had begun. However, unlike the First World War, the radical and authoritarian fascist regimes, committed some of the most heinous crimes in human history and persecuting even their own citizens. The Nazis, for instance, produced one of the most horrific forms of racial persecution in modern history under the leadership of Adolf Hitler.The systematic persecution and extermination of Jews and other minority groups in what came to be known asThe Holocaust (1933–1945) still haunts the historians of modern Europe. Joseph Goebbels, the chief propagandist of the Nazi Partyused mass media, speeches, films, and publications to spread antisemitic hatred and glorify the Nazi vision of racial nationalism. Approximately six million Jews were killed in ghettos, concentration camps, and extermination centres

such as Auschwitz Concentration Camp, alongside millions of other victims including Roma, disabled persons, political opponents, and prisoners of war.

In Italy, the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini relied heavily on repression, censorship, and political violence to maintain power. Fascist paramilitary groups known as the Blackshirts used intimidation, beatings, and assassinations against political opponents, especially socialists and trade unionists. One of the most shocking early acts of fascist brutality was the murder of the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti in 1924 after he publicly denounced electoral fraud and violence by the fascist regime.In 1937, following an assassination attempt on the Italian viceroy in Addis Ababa, Italian troops carried out the massacre known as the Yekatit 12 Massacre, killing thousands of Ethiopian civilians.

Even among the Allied states, nationalist fervour played a powerful role in mobilizing societies for total war, as governments invoked the defence of national survival and freedom to rally public support.The war eventually culminated in one of the most catastrophic acts of the twentieth century: the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Authorized by the government of the United States under President Harry S. Truman, these attacks caused immense destruction and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians. Although the bombings were justified by Allied leaders as necessary to bring a swift end to the war, they also revealed the devastating consequences of total war and the powerful nationalist motivations that drove states to pursue absolute victory. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki thus marked the tragic culmination of a conflict shaped by militant nationalism, authoritarian ambition, and global rivalry.

The experience of the two World Wars thus revealed the dangerous potential of nationalism when it fused with imperial ambition, racial ideology, and authoritarian power. In its most extreme form, this fusion produced what may be called genocidal nationalism, most tragically visible in the Holocaust and other mass atrocities of the Second World War. The devastation of the war forced Europe to rethink the meaning of nationalism itself, leading to new political arrangements in the post-war world.

Let Us Know: Yekatit 12 Massacre (1937):

The Yekatit 12 Massacre refers to the large-scale killing of Ethiopian civilians by Italian fascist forces in Addis Ababa on 19 February 1937 (Yekatit 12 in the Ethiopian calendar). The violence followed an assassination attempt on the Italian viceroy, Rodolfo Graziani.**]**

7.5 POST-WAR EUROPE AND NATIONALISM

The end of the Second World War in 1945 marked a turning point in the history of nationalism in Europe. After two devastating global conflicts within three decades, many Europeans came to view aggressive nationalism as an alarming force that had led to unprecedented destruction, genocide, andmass persecution.In Japan alone, the atomic bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, took the lives of more than 200,000 civilians with many more suffering from radiation in the years that followed. The war was over but the terrifying face of the modern warfare stills haunts

the humanity.Filled with a profound moral anxiety, J. Robert Oppenheimer, the chief architect of the Atomic Bomb in the Manhattan Project of the US, once famously remarked, “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.” Renowned Philosopher Bertrand Russell and many other European condemned it as ‘the weapons of mass destruction.’ In this context, aggressive nationalism increasingly came to be seen not as a force of liberation, but as a dangerous and destabilizing force requiring restraint and rethinking.

- **The Anti-Fascist Turn**

Yet this did not mean the disappearance of nationalism. The rise of anti-fascism among the Western democracies in 1930s and early 1940sbecame the new catalyst giving rise to new and competing forms of nationalism in post-war Europe. The fascist anxiety was visible among the intellectuals and scientists.Albert Einstein, whose early breakthrough in the field of atomic research helped developing the Nuclear Bomb was compelled to flee Nazi Germanybecause his Jewish identity.He warned President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1939 that recent developments in nuclear physics, combined with Germany’s restriction of uranium exports from occupied Czechoslovakia, could lead to the creation of “extremely powerful bombs.”This was the time when nationalism was reshaped by resistance movements, socialist groups, and democratic forces as a language of liberation and collective survival.As Eric Hobsbawm suggests, this phase witnessed a fusion of national identity with social and political aspirations, where patriotism became inseparable from anti-fascist resistance. This anti-fascist nationalism,however, it did not produce a unified outcome. Instead, it evolved into multiple and often competing forms of nationalism, shaped by ideological divisions, geopolitical rivalries, and processes of reconstruction.

- **Capitalism, Communism, and the Post-War Order**

The underlying tensionsbetween nations in Europe and beyond after the warwere rooted in the fundamental ideological differences between communism and capitalism.Communist Russia and the capitalist Western democracies were fundamentally different. These differences were temporarily set aside during the Second World War because of a common fight against fascism, but they were never fully resolved.The use of atomic weapons in 1945 can also be interpreted as a divisive symptom of the emerging gulf between capitalism and communism. Although officially justified as a necessary measure to hasten Japan’s surrender, many historians argue that the war had already turned decisively in favour of the Allied powers. Within this context, the deployment of the bomb appears less as a purely military necessity and more as a calculated political act. It functioned as a demonstration of technological and military supremacy, implicitly directed at the Soviet Union, whose growing influence in the post-war world was increasingly perceived as a challenge. Thus, the end of the Second World War was also the beginning of a new geopolitical order marked by national rivalrywhere competing visions of capitalism and communism came to define global power relations.

Within this fractured and contested political landscape, nationalism became increasingly intertwined with the conflicting ideological and economic systems of the post-war world, particularly capitalism and communism.One important manifestation of this dynamic character of nationalism was evident in the reconstruction of Germany

after 1945.After 1945, Germany became the central site where nationalism was redefined. Rather than being eradicated, German nationalism was reshaped through processes such as denazification, democratization, and economic reconstruction. This change was not merely administrative but ideological: nationalism was now expected to align with democratic values and international cooperation. Yet, this reconstruction was quickly overtaken by geopolitical realities. Germany was divided into West Germany and East Germany, each embodying a different interpretation of anti-fascist nationalism – onerooted in liberal democracy and capitalism, the other in socialism and communist ideology. Thus, even in a single nation, anti-fascist nationalism split into competing ideological nationalisms.

- **Cold War divide**

The term "Cold War" was first used by George Orwell in 1945, when he predicted a world divided between powerful nuclear nations. In other words, the Cold War was a period of political and ideological tension between the United States and the Soviet Union after World WarII.This division soon became a reality, as the wartime alliance between the United States, the Soviet Union, and European powers rapidly dissolved.This divergence, as discussed earlier, was not confined to Germany alone. Across Europe, countries such as Britain, France, and Italy aligned with the United States and the capitalist bloc, while Eastern European nations including Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria came under the influence of the Soviet Union, forming the communist bloc.Nationalism became entangled with this emerging Cold War divide. In Western Europe, it was linked to democratic reconstruction, economic recovery, and integration within a capitalist framework. In Eastern Europe, it was reinterpreted through the lens of socialism, anti-capitalism, and alignment with Soviet power.

By the late 1940s, Western Europe was increasingly integrated into alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), established in 1949 as a military alliance of the United States, Canada, and Western European nations, aimed at ensuring collective security against the Soviet Union. This security framework was further extended through alliances like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO, 1954) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO, 1955), reflecting the expansion of Western military cooperation beyond Europe. In contrast, Eastern Europe was consolidated under Soviet influence, later formalized through the Warsaw Pact (1955), which brought together the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies under a unified military command. Beyond Europe, the Soviet Union also entered into strategic partnerships such as the Sino-Soviet Treaty (1950), reinforcing its position within the communist bloc.

Secondly, the economic reconstruction of Europe further deepened this ideological divide. In Western Europe, economic recovery was closely tied to capitalist cooperation and integration, giving rise to what may be termed a form of 'cooperative nationalism, where national interests were advanced through collaboration rather than rivalry. The Marshall Plan (1947) played a crucial role in rebuilding war-torn economies while simultaneously binding them to the United States. This process of cooperation was further institutionalized through initiatives such as the European Coal and Steel Community (1951), which marked an early step toward economic integration and later evolved into what is now the European Union. In contrast, Eastern Europe's economic

systems were reorganized under Soviet direction through the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), established in 1949 to coordinate socialist economies and reinforce economic interdependence within the communist bloc. While this too involved coordination, it operated within a more centralized framework shaped by Soviet authority, reflecting a different articulation of nationalism within the socialist sphere.

Third, these military and economic divisions gradually gave rise to an intense arms race, reflecting what may be termed a form of armed nationalism**.**In this context, national identity and prestige became inseparable from technological and military superiority. By the 1960s, both the United States and the Soviet Union possessed vast nuclear arsenals, demonstrating how national power was increasingly measured through strategic capability. This competition was intensified by advances such as Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), which enabled the rapid delivery of nuclear warheads across continents, and by the development of increasingly destructive weapons, from atomic (fission) bombs to far more powerful hydrogen (fusion) bombs.At the same time, this escalation was driven not only by the pursuit of dominance but also by a profound sense of mutual insecurity. Each side perceived the other's growing military capability as a direct threat, leading to a cycle of suspicion, competition, and strategic build-up.This dynamic reached a critical point with the deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962. This Cuban Missile Crisis, must therefore be understood within this context of mutual suspicion and strategic anxiety which brought the world to the brink of nuclear war, revealing both the dangers of this militarized form of nationalism.

Let Us Know: Cold War Anxiety and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962)

The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. The Soviet Union installed intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) in Cuba, which placed major cities of the United States – suchas Washington, D.C. and New York – withinstriking distance.**]**

Activity 1.1

Identify two examples where nationalism acted as: (a) A unifying force (b) A divisive force

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. What is meant by the Cold War?

Q2. What was NATO?

Q3. Why was Germany divided after 1945?

Q4. How did nationalism change after World War II?

Q5. Define 'fascism'.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

- Nationalism evolved from a liberal and democratic force into more aggressive and expansionist forms in the late 19th century.
- Imperialism became closely linked with nationalism, as nation-states pursued colonies for economic gain and prestige.
- The First World War emerged from the interaction of ethnic nationalism, imperial rivalry, and alliance systems.
- In the inter-war period, nationalism was radicalized into fascism, an authoritarian ideology that subordinated individuals to the nation.
- The Second World War revealed the extreme dangers of militarized and racial nationalism, including genocide and total war.
- After 1945, nationalism was redefined through democratic reconstruction and international cooperation, but remained shaped by Cold War divisions and ideological conflict.
- Thus, nationalism has always been both integrative and divisive, capable of fostering unity as well as conflict.

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

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✓ 7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q 1: The Cold War was a period of political and ideological tension between the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II.

Ans to Q 2:NATO was a military alliance formed in 1949 to ensure collective security among Western nations.

Ans to Q 3: Germany was divided after 1945 due to ideological differences between capitalist and communist powers.

Ans to Q 4: After World War II, nationalism was redefined through democratic reconstruction and international cooperation. However, it remained divided along ideological lines between capitalism and communism, especially during the Cold War, where it was linked to military strength and global rivalry.

Ans to Q 5: Fascism is an authoritarian ideology that places the nation above the individual. It rejects democracy, promotes militarism, and demands absolute loyalty to the state and leader.

? 7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the relationship between nationalism and imperialism.
2. Discuss the causes of the First World War.
3. Explain the rise of fascism in Europe.
4. Trace the transformation of nationalism in Europe from the nineteenth century to the post-war period.
5. Analyse how nationalism contributed to the outbreak of the First and Second World Wars.
6. Discuss the reconfiguration of nationalism in post-war Europe in the context of the Cold War.

UNIT 8: NATIONALISM AND MIDDLE EAST

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Arab Nationalism

- Debates and Discourses

8.4 Israel-Palestine Crisis

8.5 Let Us Sum Up

8.6 Further readings

8.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.8 Model questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss about nationalism in the Middle East.
- analysis the various debates, discourses around Arab nationalism.
- Discuss the Israel-Palestine crisis.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

Nationalism has had a significant impact on the Middle East's modern political, social, and intellectual history. The rise of nationalist ideas altered the region from a collection of multi-ethnic and multi-religious provinces under the Ottoman Empire to a landscape of autonomous nation-states with distinct political identity. Unlike the development of nationalism in Europe, which was primarily associated with linguistic unity and territorial consolidation, nationalism in the Middle East emerged as a result of Ottoman decline, European imperial expansion, colonial intervention, religious reform movements, and anti-colonial struggles. As a result, Middle Eastern nationalism took several forms, reflecting the region's vast historical, cultural, and ethnic diversity.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed profound political transformations. The slow decline of the Ottoman Empire gave opportunity for new political concepts based on identity, self-determination, and sovereignty. At the same time, European interference increased through diplomacy, trade, missionary activities, and colonial administration, introducing Western political notions such as nationalism, constitutionalism, and popular sovereignty. However, these ideas were neither passively accepted nor widely implemented. Instead, they were shaped by local historical experiences and merged with existing cultural, religious, and linguistic identities, resulting in various forms of nationalism throughout the Middle East.

Among these, Arab nationalism became one of the twentieth century's most prominent ideological movements. Arab nationalism began as a cultural and linguistic resurgence (Nahda) in the Arab-speaking world, but it eventually evolved into a political movement supporting Arab unity and independence from Ottoman and then European colonial domination. However, the notion has remained the subject of much scholarly discussion. Some historians see Arab nationalism as a true expression of a shared language and cultural identity, but others believe it was mostly a political response to imperial dominance and colonial partition. Additional debates concern the relationship between Arab nationalism and Islam, the extent to which regional identities challenged pan-Arab aspirations, and the reasons for the eventual decline of pan-Arabism after the Arab-Israeli wars and the rise of individual nation-states. These debates illustrate that Arab nationalism has never been a single, uniform ideology but rather a dynamic and evolving political discourse shaped by changing historical circumstances.

The study of Middle Eastern nationalism is inextricably linked to the Israel-Palestine conflict, one of modern history's most lasting and controversial disagreements. The conflict is the result of conflicting nationalisms—Jewish Zionism and Palestinian Arab nationalism—both asserting historical, political, and territorial rights to the same country. The founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the displacement of vast numbers of Palestinians during the Nakba, subsequent Arab-Israeli wars, military occupation, settlement development, and numerous peace proposals have all had a significant impact on regional politics and international relations. Beyond a territorial dispute, the conflict highlights larger issues of national identity, statehood, sovereignty, refugee rights, historical memory, and international law. It has also shaped the foreign policies of Middle Eastern states and remains central to discussions of nationalism, security, and regional stability. Nationalism in the Middle East cannot be understood solely through the experiences of Arab societies or the Israel–Palestine question. The region has also witnessed the rise of Turkish, Iranian, Kurdish, and other forms of nationalism, each responding to distinct historical experiences and political contexts. These diverse nationalist movements often interacted, competed, and occasionally conflicted with one another, reflecting the region's ethnic, linguistic, and religious plurality. Moreover, globalization, transnational religious movements, migration, and changing geopolitical realities have further reshaped nationalist discourses in the twenty-first century.

As a result, studying nationalism in the Middle East involves an interdisciplinary approach that includes history, political science, sociology, and international relations. It examines how competing narratives of identity, culture, religion, and geography shaped state formation, anti-colonial struggles, regional wars, and diplomatic relations. Understanding Arab nationalism, its different debates and interpretations, as well as the ongoing Israel-Palestine dilemma, is critical for examining the larger political dynamics that have defined the modern Middle East and continue to affect world politics.

8.3 ARAB NATIONALISM

Arab nationalism evolved as one of the most prominent political and intellectual movements in modern Middle Eastern history. It is broadly characterized as the notion that the Arab people, who share a shared language, history, and cultural legacy, form a

single country capable of political unity and self-determination. Although its origins may be traced back to the nineteenth century cultural awakening, Arab nationalism rose to prominence as a significant political ideology during the Ottoman Empire's demise and the succeeding period of European colonial dominance. Throughout the twentieth century, it had a significant impact on state creation, anticolonial conflicts, regional politics, and Arab identity discussions.

Arab nationalism has its roots in the Nahda, or Arab Renaissance, an intellectual and cultural resurgence that occurred in the Ottoman Empire's Arab territories throughout the nineteenth century. This movement promoted the resuscitation of Arabic language, literature, education, and scientific research. Butrus al-Bustani, Jurji Zaydan, and Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi were intellectuals who aimed to revive Arab cultural pride while also encouraging educational reforms and political awareness. Initially, these philosophers did not support complete independence from the Ottoman Empire, but rather for administrative changes, increased autonomy, and recognition of Arab language and cultural identity.

The movement took on a unique political aspect in the early twentieth century, as Ottoman centralization under the Young Turks promoted Turkish nationalism. Many Arab academics and political leaders saw these initiatives as a threat to Arab identity and regional autonomy. During World War I (1914-1918), Arab leaders, most notably Sharif Hussein of Mecca, led the Arab Revolt (1916) against Ottoman control, with British help. Although the revolution sparked hopes for an independent and unified Arab state, these hopes were dashed by secret treaties like the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the Balfour Declaration (1917), which divided much of the Arab world between British and French spheres of influence. These developments enhanced anticolonial resentment and promoted Arab nationalism as a political independence movement (Cleveland). These developments strengthened anti-colonial sentiment and reinforced Arab nationalism as a movement for political independence. Arab nationalism is based on several interrelated principles. The notion that the Arab people are one nation (al-Ummah al-Arabiyyah) bound together by a common language, shared historical experiences, and cultural traditions is the most important of these. Language played a crucial role in nationalist ideas since Arabic was viewed as the primary marker of collective identity and historical continuity. Nationalist philosophers maintained that the political fragmentation caused by colonial powers was artificial and that the Arab world should eventually be united under a common political framework.

Another significant factor was anti-imperialism. European colonial dominance over regions such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Algeria, and North Africa prompted nationalist leaders to make political independence the major goal of the movement. As a result, Arab nationalism became intimately identified with resistance to British and French control, as well as opposition to external political intervention. Secularism had an essential role in much of Arab nationalist ideas. Although Islam was an important part of Arab civilization, several key nationalist ideologues, notably Michel Aflaq, a founder of the Ba'ath Party, maintained that Arab identity transcended theological divides. This view attempted to bring together Muslims, Christians, and other religious communities through a shared linguistic and cultural legacy rather than just through religious affiliation.

During the mid-twentieth century, Arab nationalism evolved into the doctrine of **Pan-Arabism,** which advocated the political unification of all Arab states. The most prominent exponent of this vision was Egyptian President **Gamal Abdel Nasser,** whose leadership following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 transformed Arab nationalism into a mass political movement. Nasser promoted Arab unity, social justice, economic modernization, and resistance to Western imperialism. His nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 and successful resistance during the Suez Crisis greatly enhanced his popularity throughout the Arab world. The most ambitious attempt to implement Pan-Arabism was the creation of the **United Arab Republic (1958–1961),** which united Egypt and Syria into a single state. However, administrative difficulties, political disagreements, and unequal distribution of power resulted in Syria's withdrawal after only three years. Similar efforts at Arab political integration elsewhere also encountered considerable obstacles, demonstrating the practical difficulties of transforming cultural unity into political union

Arab nationalism has sparked substantial scholarly debate. One of the most heated debates is about its beginnings. Some historians claim that Arab nationalism arose organically from the Nahda's artistic resurgence, while others believe it grew largely as a political response to Ottoman centralization and European imperialism. This discussion displays different perspectives on whether nationalism was primarily cultural or political in character. Another prominent topic is the link between Arab nationalism and Islam. While secular nationalists prioritized language and common historical experience, Islamist theorists maintained that religion was the major source of political identity. This dynamic has continued to affect political movements throughout the Middle East, particularly since the fall of secular nationalist governments in the late twentieth century.

Scholars have also discussed the failure of Pan-Arabism. The loss of Arab states in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, growing rivalry among Arab governments, economic inequities, and the rise of strong territorial nationalisms all undermined dreams for political unification. Individual governments began to prioritize national interests over collective Arab identity, decreasing the practical impact of Pan-Arab ideology (Dawisha, 2003). A further dispute rages about the distinction between Arab nationalism and state nationalism. While Arab nationalism promotes solidarity among all Arabic-speaking peoples, state nationalism focuses on devotion to specific nation-states such as Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, or Syria. Since the latter part of the twentieth century, state-based nationalism has generally gained greater traction than broader Pan-Arab ideas, yet Arab identity retains cultural and symbolic relevance.

Despite its political losses, Arab nationalism has left an indelible mark on the modern Middle East. It fueled anti-colonial uprisings, aided the formation of independent Arab governments, promoted educational and cultural rebirth, and molded regional political discourse throughout the twentieth century. Its emphasis on language unity and shared historical consciousness continues to inform discussions about identity, regional cooperation, and political legitimacy. Although Pan-Arab political unification has yet to be achieved, Arab nationalism remains an important paradigm for comprehending the Arab world's historical evolution and responses to colonialism, state formation, and regional conflicts.

• Debates and Discourses

Arab nationalism has remained one of the most contentious issues in Middle Eastern historiography and political thinking. Since its inception in the late nineteenth century, researchers, political leaders, and intellectuals have widely disagreed in their interpretations of its origins, ideological basis, goals, and historical trajectory. Rather than embodying a single, coherent ideology, Arab nationalism has developed through a variety of intellectual traditions and political experiences, sparking multiple disputes over identity, religion, colonialism, statehood, and regional unity. These disputes affected both academic scholarship and political discourse in the Arab world, and they continue to influence current conversations about nationalism and regional politics.

One of the earliest and most ongoing controversies is about the origins of Arab nationalism. According to one important school of thought, Arab nationalism arose from the nineteenth-century Nahda (Arab Renaissance). According to this interpretation, Arab intellectuals aimed to revitalize Arabic language, literature, science, and historical consciousness, providing the groundwork for a modern Arab identity. Long before nationalism became a political concept, thinkers like Butrus al-Bustani, Jurji Zaydan, and Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq advocated for educational reform, literary resurrection, and linguistic unification. From this viewpoint, nationalism sprang organically from cultural awakening rather than direct political strife.

An alternate perspective focuses on political rather than cultural considerations. According to scholars such as Adeed Dawisha, Arab nationalism gained traction mainly in response to the Ottoman Empire's centralizing tactics, particularly after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, and later via resistance to European colonial dominance. According to this viewpoint, nationalism was more of a political movement born out of imperial control, foreign occupation, and calls for self-determination (Dawisha, 2003). This dispute is still relevant because it informs how historians interpret the interaction between culture and politics in the construction of modern Arab identity.

Another prominent debate involves the link between Arab nationalism and Islam. Secular nationalist theorists argued that Arab nationality should be defined primarily by shared language, history, and culture, rather than religious adherence. Michel Aflaq, one of the Ba'ath Party's primary ideologues, maintained that while Islam was an important part of Arab civilization, Arab nationalism should continue to include Muslims, Christians, and other religious groups. He saw Islam as a historical and cultural force that shaped Arab civilization, rather than the primary source of political identity. In contrast, several Islamist intellectuals questioned the secular interpretation. Sayyid Qutb and Abul A'la Maududi contended that the Islamic Ummah (community of believers) went beyond ethnic and linguistic boundaries. From their perspective, political organization based on Arab ethnicity risked dividing the broader Muslim community and subordinating religion to secular nationalism. This intellectual tension between nationalism and Islam became increasingly pronounced during the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly after the decline of Pan-Arabism and the rise of Islamic political movements following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

Pan-Arabism versus Territorial Nationalism

The link between Pan-Arab nationalism and territorial nationalism is a major topic of controversy in Arab political theory. Pan-Arabists contended that all Arabic-speaking peoples were a one country, artificially split by colonial lines imposed by agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement. As a result, they campaigned for the political unification of all Arab countries into a single state or federation. However, many political leaders put their own nation-state interests before of Arab unity. Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and other Arab countries eventually established separate political identities, administrative systems, and national interests. The failure of initiatives like the United Arab Republic (1958-1961) revealed the practical challenges of achieving political integration despite shared cultural and linguistic links. As a result, territorial nationalism increasingly replaced Pan-Arab aspirations in the political life of the Middle East. This debate remains relevant today because many Arab societies continue to identify simultaneously with their nation-state and with a broader Arab cultural community, reflecting multiple and overlapping identities rather than exclusive loyalties.

Colonialism and the Construction of Arab Nationalism

Another major scholarly discussion looks at how colonial intervention influenced Arab nationalism. Some historians suggest that European imperialism unintentionally bolstered Arab nationalism by imposing artificial political boundaries, establishing modern bureaucratic structures, and encouraging anti-colonial resistance. British and French mandates in Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, and Transjordan prompted locals to organize against foreign control and demand national independence.

Postcolonial historians, on the other hand, contend that colonial forces intentionally fostered community, ethnic, and sectarian tensions in order to undermine nationalist unity. Policies that favored certain groups, the establishment of separate administrative divisions, and external political intervention fractured the Arab world and hampered the achievement of Pan-Arab goals. Edward Said's critique of Orientalism further suggests that colonial knowledge systems often represented Arab societies through stereotypes that justified imperial domination and influenced Western interpretations of Arab nationalism

The Debate over the Failure of Arab Nationalism

Perhaps the most extensively discussed problem is the apparent fall or failure of Arab nationalism. During the 1950s and 1960s, Arab nationalism looked to be the region's dominant political ideology, particularly under Gamal Abdel Nasser's leadership. However, many developments eroded its power. Arab governments' defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War greatly eroded trust in Pan-Arab leadership. The failure to attain political unity, growing ideological disputes among Arab states, military coups, economic disparities, and competition for regional leadership all contributed to fragmentation. The establishment of oil-producing Gulf states with separate economic interests, the expansion of political Islam, and the increasing importance of state sovereignty have altered political priorities away from Pan-Arab unification.

However, many historians warn against dismissing Arab nationalism as completely ineffective. Rashid Khalidi contends that, while political unification failed, Arab nationalism succeeded in developing a shared linguistic and cultural consciousness that continues to impact literature, education, media, diplomacy, and popular political discourse throughout the Arab world.

Identity, Minorities, and Inclusivity

Another area of contemporary debate concerns the inclusiveness of Arab nationalism. Critics argue that its emphasis on Arab identity sometimes marginalized non-Arab ethnic communities such as Kurds, Amazigh (Berbers), Assyrians, Nubians, and other minorities. These communities often developed their own nationalist movements in response to policies of Arabization adopted by certain governments. Similarly, scholars have questioned whether Arab nationalism adequately accommodated religious diversity. Although many nationalist leaders promoted secular citizenship, political realities often produced tensions among Muslims, Christians, Druze, and other religious communities. Consequently, modern scholarship increasingly examines Arab nationalism through the perspectives of minority identities, gender, regionalism, and sub-national movements, thereby broadening earlier state-centred interpretations.

Contemporary Relevance

Although Pan-Arabism no longer dominates Middle Eastern politics, issues about Arab nationalism remain highly relevant. The Arab Spring (2010-2012), ongoing wars in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, and fresh conversations about regional cooperation all show that issues of identity, sovereignty, and collective political action continue to define Arab political philosophy. Modern scholarship increasingly sees Arab nationalism as a dynamic discourse that intersects with globalization, state nationalism, Islamism, and transnational political movements. Finally, the discussions surrounding Arab nationalism highlight its complexities as both an intellectual heritage and a political movement. Discussions on its roots, relationship with Islam, tensions between Pan-Arab and territorial nationalism, colonial influences, political achievements, and limitations show that Arab nationalism cannot be described using a single explanatory framework. Instead, it is a vibrant field of study that continues to influence historical scholarship and present political discourse in the Middle East.

8.4 ISRAEL-PALESTINE CRISIS

The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the longest and most complex political confrontations in modern history. It involves rival historical narratives, geographical claims, national identities, religious importance, and international legal issues. At its heart, the conflict revolves around the desire of two peoples—Jews and Palestinians—to form and maintain sovereign governments on the same geographical territory. Over the last century, the struggle has influenced not just the Middle East's political landscape, but also international diplomacy, humanitarian policy, and global security. Although the war has theological overtones due to the hallowed importance of Jerusalem and other holy places, historians largely agree that it is ultimately rooted in

nationalism, colonialism, territorial sovereignty, and conflicting claims to self-determination.

The struggle dates back to the late nineteenth century, when Zionism emerged as a nationalist movement supporting the construction of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Political Zionism, founded by Theodor Herzl, arose in response to increasing anti-Semitism and persecution of Jewish communities throughout Europe. Zionist leaders contended that the Jewish people were a distinct nation entitled to a sovereign homeland in which they might live safely. Despite the fact that Palestine was primarily inhabited by Arab Palestinians who had lived in the region for millennia, it became the primary site of Jewish settlement.

During World War I, Palestine's political destiny grew more difficult. In 1917, the British government released the Balfour Declaration, which expressed support for the formation of a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine while also stressing that the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish populations should be protected. This declaration created competing expectations between Jews and Arabs, laying the groundwork for future clashes. Following the Ottoman Empire's demise, Palestine was placed under British Mandate, which resulted in massive Jewish immigration, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s when European Jews fled persecution. Palestinian Arabs were increasingly concerned about this demographic transition, which resulted in outbreaks of communal violence and political upheaval.

Following World War II, the crisis took a severe turn. In 1947, the United Nations Partition Plan (Resolution 181) advocated partitioning Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab republics, with Jerusalem under international control. Jewish leaders supported the proposal despite their objections, while Arab leaders rejected it, claiming that it infringed the political rights of Palestine's Arab majority. On May 14, 1948, the State of Israel declared independence. The next day, neighbouring Arab governments invaded militarily, sparking the First Arab-Israeli War (1948-1949). Israel won and expanded beyond the region allotted under the UN Partition Plan. For Palestinians, these events are known as the Nakba ("catastrophe"), during which about 700,000 Palestinians were displaced or became refugees. The refugee issue remains one of the central unresolved dimensions of the conflict.

Following decades of war, the Middle East's geopolitical landscape changed dramatically. The 1967 Six-Day War was particularly noteworthy because Israel took control of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights. Although Sinai was later returned to Egypt following the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, Israel maintained control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while Gaza remained under Israeli occupation until the unilateral departure of settlements and military personnel in 2005. The ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank have remained among the most contentious issues in international diplomacy, with much of the international community considering these settlements contrary to international law under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

During this time, the Palestinian national movement took significant steps forward. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), founded in 1964, emerged as the primary representative of the Palestinian people under Yasser Arafat's leadership. Initially devoted to military struggle, the PLO later switched to diplomatic engagement and acknowledged Israel's right to exist as part of the late twentieth-century peace process. Simultaneously, other organizations, including Hamas, founded in 1987 during the First Intifada, took various political and ideological approaches, causing splits in Palestinian politics. These internal disagreements have hindered negotiations and governance in the Palestinian territory.

Efforts to resolve the conflict have mostly focused on the two-state solution, which envisions an independent State of Palestine coexisting with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders. The Oslo Accords (1993–1995) were the most major attempt to attain this goal. The agreements established mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO, as well as the Palestinian Authority, which was created to manage areas of the West Bank and Gaza. However, essential issues remained unsolved, including Jerusalem's status, Palestinian refugees' right to return, Israeli settlements, boundaries, water resources, and security arrangements. Subsequent discussions, including the Camp David Summit (2000) and later peace initiatives, failed to yield a comprehensive agreement.

The humanitarian repercussions of the fighting have been enormous. Recurrent military conflicts, particularly in Gaza, have resulted in large-scale civilian casualties, displacement, infrastructure devastation, and extreme economic hardship. Movement restrictions, recurrent violence, humanitarian crises, and human rights issues continue to afflict Palestinians and Israelis, albeit in various ways and to varying degrees. The battle has also caused significant psychological suffering, exacerbated mutual distrust, and hindered the possibilities for long-term reconciliation. The Israel-Palestine dispute continues to shape Middle Eastern politics and worldwide relations. Regional organizations, the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and adjacent Arab states have all played significant diplomatic roles, but a long-term political settlement remains elusive. The ongoing dispute reflects not only rival territory claims, but also deeply ingrained historical memories, national identities, security concerns, and differing views of justice and sovereignty. As a result, the Israel-Palestine dispute remains one of the most defining difficulties in current world politics, as well as a critical subject for understanding nationalism, conflict, and peace-building in the modern Middle East.

Nationalism has been one of the most transforming forces in Middle Eastern political and social history, inspiring the formation of modern governments, influencing anti-colonial battles, and redefining regional identities during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Unlike the relatively homogeneous models of nationalism that emerged in parts of Europe, nationalism in the Middle East evolved within a complex historical context marked by imperial rule, ethnic and religious diversity, colonial intervention, and competing visions of political community. As a result, nationalist movements in the region represented a variety of desires and identities rather than a single, cohesive ideological framework. Among these movements, Arab nationalism emerged as a potent political and intellectual force that aimed to unite Arabic-speaking

peoples around a common language, history, and cultural heritage. It was essential in mobilizing resistance to Ottoman centralization and, later, European colonialism, as well as inspiring political independence movements throughout the Arab world. At the same time, intellectual arguments revealed that Arab nationalism was neither ideologically homogeneous nor politically unopposed. Questions about its roots, relationship with Islam, Pan-Arabism's viability, and the tension between supranational unity and territorial statehood remain central to historical and political discourse. Although the vision of a politically united Arab world was never fully realized, Arab nationalism significantly influenced state formation, political thought, and cultural consciousness across the Middle East.

The Israel-Palestine conflict highlights the complexities of nationalism in the region. The conflict is the result of two conflicting national movements Jewish Zionism and Palestinian nationalism—both with separate historical histories and claims to the same area. Over the course of more than a century, the conflict has developed from a territorial dispute to a larger struggle over sovereignty, identity, historical memory, security, refugee rights, and international law. Repeated wars, displacement, occupation, failed peace initiatives, and humanitarian crises have all contributed to the conflict being one of contemporary international politics' defining challenges. Its endurance demonstrates the enormous difficulty of reconciling different nationalist goals in a region riven by historical grievances and geopolitical conflicts.

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Modern developments show that nationalism is still a dynamic and changing phenomena, rather than a completed historical process. While Pan-Arabism has faded as a prominent political philosophy, issues of national identity, sovereignty, self-determination, and regional solidarity continue to shape domestic politics and international relations in the Middle East. Similarly, the unsolved Israel-Palestine dispute continues to impact diplomatic agendas, regional security, and humanitarian concerns, proving that the legacies of twentieth-century nationalism are still profoundly

ingrained in contemporary politics. The history of nationalism in the Middle East demonstrates how culture, language, religion, colonialism, and political power interact to shape modern countries. Arab nationalism and the Israel-Palestine conflict demonstrate both the unifying potential and the limitations of nationalist ideologies in communities marked by diversity and historical complexity. A critical knowledge of these processes allows scholars to recognize nationalism's continuing importance as a driving factor in defining the Middle East's political environment, as well as its lasting influence on global affairs.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Which Egyptian leader became the foremost advocate of Pan-Arabism in the twentieth century?
2. What does the Arabic term *Nakba* mean?
3. Which international organization proposed the partition of Palestine in 1947?
4. Which political ideology emphasizes loyalty to a single Arab nation based on common language and culture?

8.5 Let us sum up

After going through this Unit, you have learnt that-

- Nationalism emerged as a major political force in the Middle East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
- Arab nationalism became the most influential nationalist movement
- Arab nationalism has been the subject of extensive scholarly debates
- The Israel–Palestine crisis represents one of the most enduring consequences of competing nationalist movements in the Middle East.
- Nationalism continues to shape contemporary Middle Eastern politics.

8.6 FURTHER READINGS

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5. Hourani, A. (1991). *A history of the Arab peoples*. Harvard University Press.
6. Smith, C. D. (2021). *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict* (10th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.
7. United Nations. (1949). *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention)*. Geneva: United Nations.

✓ 8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer 1: Gamel Abdel Nasser
Answer 2: Catastrophe
Answer 3: United Nations (UN)
Answer 4: Arab Nationalism

? 8.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the historical background and emergence of Arab nationalism.
2. Explain the major debates and discourses surrounding Arab nationalism.
3. Examine the causes that led to the Israel–Palestine crisis.
4. Assess the impact of nationalism on the political transformation of the modern Middle East.
5. Critically examine the origin, development, and significance of Arab nationalism in the Middle East.
6. Discuss the major debates and scholarly discourses on Arab nationalism, highlighting the issues of Pan-Arabism, Islam, colonialism, and state nationalism.
7. Analyse the historical evolution of the Israel–Palestine crisis, highlighting its major causes, developments, and contemporary challenges.
8. Evaluate the role of nationalism in shaping the political history of the Middle East, with special reference to Arab nationalism and the Israel–Palestine conflict.

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UNIT 9: NATIONALISM IN ASIA – I

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objective

9.2 Introduction

9.3 China

9.4 Japan

9.5 Let us sum up

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.8 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand the emergence of nationalism in China and Japan;
- identify the major factors responsible for the growth of nationalism in both countries;
- examine the important events, movements and leaders associated with Chinese and Japanese nationalism;
- analyse the role of the Meiji Restoration and the Chinese Revolution in the development of nationalism; and
- assess the significance of nationalism in the political transformation and modernization of China and Japan.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Nationalism emerged as one of the most influential political and social forces in Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike Europe, where nationalism largely developed alongside the formation of nation-states, Asian nationalism arose mainly as a response to imperialism, foreign domination and internal political crises. The growing influence of Western powers compelled many Asian societies to rethink their political institutions, strengthen national unity and undertake programmes of reform and modernization. As a result, nationalism became an important force in shaping the modern history of several Asian countries.

China and Japan present two distinct yet equally significant experiences of nationalism. In China, nationalism developed during a period of political decline under the Qing Dynasty and was largely a response to foreign intervention, unequal treaties and repeated military defeats. It inspired reform movements, revolutionary activities and eventually led to the overthrow of the imperial system and the establishment of a republic. In the following decades, Chinese nationalism continued to evolve through

political movements, resistance to Japanese aggression and efforts to build a modern nation-state.

Japan, on the other hand, followed a different path. Faced with the challenge of Western expansion, Japanese leaders introduced wide-ranging political, economic, educational and military reforms following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. These reforms transformed Japan into a modern industrial nation within a relatively short period. Nationalism played a crucial role in promoting national unity and modernization, but it also encouraged imperial expansion in East Asia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

This unit examines the growth and development of nationalism in China and Japan. It discusses the historical circumstances that led to the emergence of nationalist movements, the role of important leaders and political organisations, and the impact of nationalism on the political transformation and modernization of these two countries. Through this study, learners will gain an understanding of how nationalism shaped the course of modern Asian history.

9.3 CHINA

Nationalism emerged as a powerful political force in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It developed mainly as a response to foreign imperialism, internal political instability and the gradual decline of the Qing Dynasty. Unlike the nationalist movements in Europe, which largely aimed at the unification of nation-states, Chinese nationalism focused on preserving national sovereignty, ending foreign domination and rebuilding a strong and modern nation. It inspired a series of political reforms, revolutionary movements and intellectual debates that eventually transformed China from an imperial monarchy into a republic.

China was ruled by successive imperial dynasties for more than two thousand years. The last of these was the Qing Dynasty, established by the Manchus in 1644. During its early years, the Qing Empire enjoyed political stability, territorial expansion and economic prosperity. However, by the nineteenth century, the dynasty began to weaken due to administrative corruption, rapid population growth, financial problems and repeated peasant uprisings. The government found it increasingly difficult to maintain law and order or respond effectively to both internal and external challenges.

The situation became more serious with the expansion of Western imperialism. Following the Industrial Revolution, European countries sought new markets and commercial opportunities in Asia. The Qing government attempted to regulate foreign trade through the Canton System, which restricted foreign merchants to the port of Canton (Guangzhou). Britain, which imported large quantities of Chinese tea, silk and porcelain, wanted greater access to the Chinese market. Since China showed little interest in British manufactured goods, British merchants expanded the illegal trade in opium grown in India.

The widespread use of opium created serious social and economic problems in China. In 1839, the Qing government appointed **Lin Zexu** to suppress the illegal opium

trade. He confiscated and destroyed large quantities of opium at Canton, leading to the **First Opium War (1839–1842)**between China and Britain. The superior military strength of Britain resulted in China's defeat. Under the **Treaty of Nanking (1842),** China ceded Hong Kong to Britain, opened five treaty ports to foreign trade and agreed to pay a large indemnity. This treaty was followed by several other agreements, collectively known as the **Unequal Treaties**, which granted extensive commercial and legal privileges to foreign powers. These treaties significantly weakened China's sovereignty and increased foreign influence over its economy and administration.

China suffered another defeat in the **Second Opium War (1856–1860),** fought against Britain and France. The resulting treaties opened additional ports to foreign trade, permitted foreign diplomatic missions in Beijing and extended extraterritorial rights to foreign nationals. By the end of the nineteenth century, several Western powers, along with Japan, had established **spheres of influence** in different parts of China. Although China was never fully colonised, its political independence was seriously undermined. Many Chinese regarded this situation as a national humiliation and began to search for ways to restore the country's strength.

At the same time, China was affected by a series of internal rebellions. The **Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864)** was one of the largest civil wars in history and caused widespread destruction. Later, the **Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901)** emerged as a popular movement against foreign influence and Christian missionaries. The rebellion was eventually crushed by an international military force, and China was compelled to pay a heavy indemnity under the Boxer Protocol. These developments further exposed the weakness of the Qing government and increased public dissatisfaction.

In an effort to strengthen the country, the Qing government introduced several reform programmes. The **Self-Strengthening Movement** encouraged the adoption of Western science, technology and military methods while preserving traditional Confucian values. Modern schools, industries, shipyards and arsenals were established under this programme. However, these reforms remained limited because they did not fundamentally change the political structure of the empire.

Another important attempt at reform was the **Hundred Days' Reform of 1898,** initiated by Emperor Guangxu with the support of reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. The reform programme proposed changes in administration, education, industry and the military. However, conservative leaders led by Empress Dowager Cixi opposed these measures, and the reforms were quickly abandoned. Their failure convinced many educated Chinese that meaningful change could not be achieved under the existing imperial system.

Rise of Nationalism

The defeat of China in the Sino- Japanese war of 1894-95 was an important cause in the rise of nationalism in China. China’s defeat by Japan, which was previously considered culturally inferior, exposed the weakness and inefficiency of the Qing Government. The humiliating treaty of Shimonoseki, (1895) through which china made territorial and economic concessions to Japan, further intensified anti-foreign

feelings. The defeat convinced Chinese intellectuals and reformers that China needed political, military and social reforms to strengthen itself. Thus, the was contributed to growing national consciousness anti-imperialist sentiment and demands for national reform and unity in China.

By the closing years of the nineteenth century, modern nationalist ideas had begun to spread among Chinese intellectuals, students and overseas communities. Many Chinese who studied abroad became familiar with Western political ideas such as constitutional government, democracy and national self-determination. They argued that China's weakness was caused not only by foreign aggression but also by the inability of the Qing government to defend the country's interests. Consequently, Chinese nationalism developed with two major objectives: ending foreign domination and replacing the Manchu dynasty with a modern government capable of strengthening the nation.

The most influential leader of this movement was **Sun Yat-sen**, who is widely regarded as the father of modern China. He believed that China's regeneration required both political and social transformation. His political philosophy was based on the **Three Principles of the People-Nationalism, Democracy**and**People's Livelihood**. Nationalism aimed to free China from foreign domination and unite its people; democracy called for a republican system of government based on popular participation; and people's livelihood sought to improve economic conditions and promote social welfare.

In **1905**, Sun Yat-sen established the **Tongmenghui (United League)** in Tokyo by bringing together several revolutionary organisations. The League organised revolutionary activities, published newspapers and mobilised students, intellectuals, merchants and overseas Chinese in support of the nationalist movement. Through these efforts, nationalist ideas spread rapidly across China and inspired increasing opposition to the Qing government.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, economic hardship, administrative corruption and resentment against foreign privileges had created favourable conditions for revolution. Nationalism gradually united diverse sections of Chinese society in the common objective of ending imperial rule and restoring China's independence and dignity.

The Republican Revolution

The growing nationalist movement reached a decisive stage with the **Revolution of 1911**, also known as the **Xinhai Revolution**. The immediate cause of the revolution was the Qing government's decision to nationalise railway projects, which led to widespread protests among merchants, investors and provincial leaders. On **10 October 1911**, soldiers at **Wuchang** revolted against the Qing government. The uprising quickly spread to several provinces, where local leaders declared their independence from the Qing administration.

Although **Sun Yat-sen** was abroad when the revolution began, he returned to China soon after and was elected the **Provisional President of the Republic of China** in January 1912. Faced with growing opposition, the last Qing emperor, **Puyi**, abdicated in February 1912, bringing to an end more than two thousand years of imperial rule in China.

The establishment of the Republic of China marked a turning point in Chinese history. It ended the dynastic system and introduced republican ideals into Chinese politics. However, the revolution did not immediately bring political stability. To avoid civil war and secure the emperor's abdication, Sun Yat-sen agreed to hand over the presidency to **Yuan Shikai**, a powerful military commander. Yuan gradually concentrated power in his own hands, dissolved the parliament and even attempted to restore monarchy by proclaiming himself emperor in 1915. His plan failed because of widespread opposition, and after his death in 1916, China entered the **Warlord Era**, during which different military leaders controlled various parts of the country.

Although the Revolution of 1911 did not establish a stable democratic government, it had far-reaching consequences. It ended imperial rule, introduced the idea of republican government and encouraged the growth of national consciousness. The revolution also inspired many Chinese to believe that the country's future depended upon unity, modernization and resistance to foreign domination.

Nationalism after 1911

After the Revolution of 1911, Chinese nationalism continued to develop through new intellectual, political and social movements. Many reformers realised that political change alone could not solve China's problems. They believed that social attitudes, education and culture also needed to be transformed if the country was to become strong and independent.

One of the most important developments during this period was the **New Culture Movement,** which began around **1915.** Led by intellectuals such as **Chen Duxiu** and **Hu Shi**, the movement encouraged science, democracy and critical thinking. It criticised rigid traditional customs and promoted the use of the vernacular language in literature and education. By making new ideas accessible to ordinary people, the movement created an intellectual environment in which nationalism could spread more widely.

The nationalist movement received a major boost after the **First World War**. China had joined the Allied Powers in the hope that the German-controlled territory of **Shandong**would be returned after the war. However, the **Treaty of Versailles (1919)** transferred Germany's rights in Shandong to Japan instead. This decision caused widespread disappointment and anger throughout China.

On **4 May 1919**, thousands of students gathered in Beijing to protest against the Treaty of Versailles. Their demonstrations soon spread to other cities and gained the support of workers, merchants and intellectuals. This became known as the **May Fourth Movement**. Although it began as a student protest, it soon developed into a

nationwide movement against foreign imperialism and political corruption. It encouraged patriotism, promoted modern education and inspired young Chinese to participate actively in national affairs. The movement broadened the social base of Chinese nationalism by involving different sections of society in the struggle for national regeneration.

Political developments during this period led to the rise of two important political organisations. **Sun Yat-sen** reorganised the nationalist movement into the **Kuomintang (KMT)**or Nationalist Party. The party sought to reunify China, end the rule of regional warlords and establish a strong republican government capable of protecting the country's independence.

In **1921**, the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** was established in Shanghai by intellectuals such as **Chen Duxiu** and **Li Dazhao,** who were influenced by Marxist ideas and the Russian Revolution**. Mao Zedong**, who later emerged as its most influential leader, expanded the party's influence among the peasants. Although the Kuomintang and the Communist Party differed in their political ideologies, both regarded national unity and resistance to foreign domination as essential for China's future.

Recognising the need for cooperation, the Kuomintang and the Communist Party formed the **First United Front**in**1924.** Together they launched the **Northern Expedition (1926–1928)** under the leadership of **Chiang Kai-shek** to defeat the regional warlords and reunify the country. Although the campaign achieved considerable success, ideological differences soon led to conflict between the two parties, resulting in a prolonged civil war.

The growth of Chinese nationalism became even stronger during the 1930s when Japan adopted an aggressive policy towards China. In 1931, Japan occupied Manchuria and established the puppet state of Manchukuo. A full-scale war broke out in 1937, when Japanese forces invaded China and occupied several important cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing. The occupation of Nanjing was accompanied by widespread violence against civilians, which further strengthened anti-Japanese sentiment throughout the country.

The Japanese invasion convinced many Chinese that national unity was essential for defending the country's independence. Consequently, the Kuomintang and the Communist Party temporarily suspended their rivalry and formed the Second United Front to resist Japanese aggression. Although cooperation between the two parties remained limited, the common struggle against foreign invasion strengthened nationalist feelings among people from different regions and social backgrounds. Nationalism thus became a powerful force that united the Chinese people in defence of their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

After Japan's defeat in 1945, the alliance between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party collapsed, and the civil war resumed. The conflict ended in 1949 with the victory of the Communist Party under Mao Zedong, who proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China, while the Nationalist government led

by Chiang Kai-shek withdrew to Taiwan. The establishment of the People's Republic marked the culmination of the long nationalist struggle that had begun in the late nineteenth century. Through decades of reform movements, revolutions and resistance against foreign domination, Chinese nationalism transformed the country from a declining imperial empire into a unified modern state.

9.4 JAPAN

Historical Background

The emergence of nationalism in Japan occupies a distinctive place in the history of modern Asia. Unlike countries such as India, Indonesia or Vietnam, where nationalism largely developed as a response to colonial rule, Japanese nationalism evolved alongside the process of political consolidation and modernization. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Japan transformed itself from a feudal society into a modern nation-state without losing its political independence. This transformation enabled the country to resist Western domination and, within a few decades, emerge as a major power in East Asia. Consequently, Japanese nationalism became closely associated with state-building, modernization and national strength.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan was governed by the Tokugawa Shogunate, established by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1603. Although the emperor remained the formal sovereign and enjoyed great cultural and religious prestige, real political authority rested with the shogun. The country was divided into several feudal domains or *han*, each administered by a *daimyo*who exercised considerable authority within his territory while acknowledging the supremacy of the Tokugawa government. This arrangement ensured political stability for more than two centuries and is often referred to as the Tokugawa or Edo period.

The Tokugawa rulers also adopted the policy of *sakoku*, or the "closed country" policy, from the 1630s. The principal objective of this policy was to regulate foreign contact and prevent external political and religious influences from disturbing domestic stability. However, Japan was not completely isolated from the outside world. Limited trade continued with the Dutch and the Chinese through the port of Nagasaki, while diplomatic and commercial relations were maintained with Korea and the Ryukyu Kingdom under carefully controlled conditions.

The Tokugawa era witnessed significant economic growth , agricultural production expanded, commerce flourished, and cities such as Edo, Osaka and Kyoto developed into important centres of administration and trade. The merchant class accumulated considerable wealth through commercial activities, while the growth of markets encouraged greater economic integration. Yet these developments also exposed weaknesses within the feudal order. Many samurai, whose incomes were fixed in rice stipends, found it increasingly difficult to maintain their traditional standard of living, whereas merchants, despite their low social status, gained substantial economic influence. Peasant discontent also increased in several regions because of heavy taxation, crop failures and recurring famines. Although the Tokugawa political

system remained stable, these social and economic changes gradually weakened the foundations of feudal society.

While Japan was experiencing these internal changes, the balance of power in Asia was undergoing a profound transformation. The Industrial Revolution had strengthened the economic and military capabilities of the Western powers, enabling them to expand their commercial and political influence across Asia. The establishment of British rule in India, the Opium Wars in China and the expansion of European colonial empires demonstrated the growing reach of Western imperialism. Japanese leaders became increasingly aware that the country could no longer remain unaffected by these international developments.

The immediate challenge came in 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy arrived in Edo Bay with a squadron of modern warships. Acting on behalf of the American government, Perry demanded that Japan establish diplomatic and commercial relations with the United States. The Tokugawa government recognised that it lacked the military capability to resist such pressure. As a result, the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed in 1854, opening the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American vessels and establishing formal diplomatic relations between the two countries. Similar treaties were subsequently concluded with Britain, France, Russia and the Netherlands.

These agreements came to be known as the Unequal Treaties because they granted extensive privileges to foreign nationals, including extraterritorial rights, while limiting Japan's control over customs duties. Many Japanese regarded these treaties as a serious infringement of national sovereignty. The inability of the Tokugawa government to resist foreign demands led to widespread criticism among samurai, scholars and influential regional leaders. Increasingly, they argued that only a strong and united government could preserve Japan's independence in the face of Western imperialism.

The political crisis gave rise to the slogan SonnoJoi, meaning "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians." Initially, the movement reflected hostility towards foreign influence and demanded the restoration of imperial authority. However, many reform-minded leaders soon realised that Japan could not successfully oppose the Western powers merely by excluding foreigners. Instead, they concluded that the country had to strengthen itself by adopting modern institutions, scientific knowledge and military technology from the West. This shift in thinking laid the intellectual foundation for the reforms that followed.

The Meiji Restoration

The growing opposition to the Tokugawa Shogunate culminated in the Meiji Restoration of 1868, one of the most significant turning points in Japanese history. Political authority was restored to Emperor Meiji, bringing an end to more than two centuries of Tokugawa rule. Although the emperor became the formal head of the state, the task of governing the country was undertaken by a group of experienced statesmen, later known as thegenro or elder statesmen. Drawn mainly from the

domains of Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa and Hizen, these leaders recognised that Japan's independence could only be preserved through rapid and comprehensive modernization.

The Meiji Restoration marked the beginning of an ambitious programme of nation-building that sought to transform Japan into a modern state capable of standing alongside the industrial powers of the West. The guiding principle of the new government was expressed in the slogan Fukoku Kyohei ("Rich Country, Strong Army"), which emphasised that economic prosperity and military strength were essential for safeguarding national sovereignty.

One of the first objectives of the Meiji government was to establish a strong central administration. Between 1869 and 1871, the feudal domains were abolished and replaced by prefectures administered by officials appointed by the central government. This reform significantly reduced the political authority of the *daimyo* and strengthened national unity by bringing the entire country under a uniform administrative structure. People who had previously identified themselves primarily with their local domains gradually began to regard themselves as citizens of a single Japanese nation.

The government also reorganised the administrative and judicial systems by creating modern ministries responsible for finance, education, justice, foreign affairs and the military. A uniform legal system replaced many of the regional laws and customs that had existed under the feudal order. These measures strengthened the authority of the central government and improved administrative efficiency throughout the country.

Recognising the need to learn from the industrialised nations, the Meiji government dispatched the Iwakura Mission (1871–1873), led by Iwakura Tomomi, to the United States and several European countries. The mission sought to study Western political institutions, industries, educational systems and military organisation. Although it did not succeed in revising the Unequal Treaties, it provided valuable information that influenced subsequent reforms in Japan. The experience convinced the Japanese leadership that modernization required not only technological advancement but also institutional and educational reform.

The process of political modernization reached an important stage with the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution in 1889. Influenced largely by the constitutional system of Prussia, the Constitution established Japan as a constitutional monarchy and created the Imperial Diet, consisting of the House of Peers and the House of Representatives. While elected representatives participated in legislation, the emperor retained extensive constitutional powers, particularly in matters relating to the military and foreign affairs. In practice, many important policy decisions continued to be shaped by the genro, who served as the emperor's principal advisers. Nevertheless, the Constitution provided Japan with modern political institutions while preserving the symbolic authority of the emperor as the embodiment of national unity.

Modernization of Japan

The Meiji leaders believed that political reforms alone would not be sufficient to secure Japan's independence. They were convinced that the country had to achieve economic progress, develop modern institutions and build an efficient military if it was to command respect among the Western powers. Modernization was therefore pursued as a comprehensive programme that touched almost every aspect of Japanese society. In this process, nationalism became closely associated with the idea of collective effort for national advancement.

The government actively promoted industrialization by establishing model factories, shipyards, iron and steel works, textile mills and engineering industries. Considerable investment was made in the construction of railways, telegraph lines, roads and modern ports to facilitate communication and trade. These developments not only stimulated economic growth but also strengthened the integration of different regions into a unified national economy.

Agriculture, which remained the principal occupation of the majority of the population, also underwent important reforms. The **Land Tax Reform of 1873** introduced private ownership of land and replaced the traditional system of taxation in kind with a fixed monetary tax. Although the new system imposed financial burdens on many cultivators, it provided the government with a stable source of revenue to finance its modernization programme. Improved agricultural methods and better transport facilities also contributed to increased productivity and commercial expansion.

As industrialization progressed, the government gradually transferred many state-owned enterprises to private entrepreneurs. This policy facilitated the emergence of powerful business houses known as the *zaibatsu*, including Mitsubishi, Mitsui, Sumitomo and Yasuda. These industrial and financial groups played an important role in the economic transformation of Japan. Their close cooperation with the government accelerated industrial growth and strengthened the country's economic foundations.

The government believed that a modern nation required an educated and disciplined population. Accordingly, the **Education Order of 1872** introduced a nationwide system of elementary education. Schools were established across the country, and the curriculum included subjects such as science, mathematics, geography, history and practical skills. These reforms greatly improved literacy and produced the skilled workforce required for industrial and administrative development.Education also served as an instrument for fostering national consciousness. Students were taught to respect the emperor, obey the law and contribute to the welfare of the nation. The **Imperial Rescript on Education** issued in 1890 emphasised virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, discipline and public duty. While the education system promoted scientific learning and technical knowledge, it also strengthened patriotic values and reinforced the idea that individual interests should be subordinated to the interests of the nation.

The modernization of the armed forces was another major objective of the Meiji government. In **1873**, compulsory military service was introduced, replacing the

traditional samurai-based army with a national army recruited from all sections of society. This reform not only strengthened Japan's military capabilities but also reduced the exclusive military privileges previously enjoyed by the samurai class. Modern training methods, improved organisation and the adoption of Western military technology transformed Japan into one of the strongest military powers in Asia. Military service also encouraged a sense of national unity, as young men from different regions and social backgrounds served together under the authority of the emperor.

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Japan had undergone a remarkable transformation. Within a relatively short period, it had established modern political institutions, expanded its industrial base, improved its educational system and developed a powerful military. These achievements generated a strong sense of national pride and reinforced the belief that Japan had successfully overcome the challenges posed by Western imperialism.

Rise of Nationalism

The modernization of Japan profoundly influenced the growth of nationalism. During the early years of the Meiji period, nationalism primarily focused on strengthening the country and protecting its independence. The leadership believed that national unity was essential if Japan was to avoid the fate of many Asian countries that had come under colonial rule. Consequently, the state actively encouraged loyalty to the emperor and promoted the idea that every citizen had a responsibility towards the nation.

The emperor occupied a unique position in the development of Japanese nationalism. He was not merely the constitutional head of the state but also the symbol of the nation's unity and continuity. Government policies, educational institutions and public ceremonies consistently emphasised devotion to the emperor as an expression of patriotism. This helped foster a strong sense of national identity among the people. The rapid growth of industries, improvements in infrastructure and expansion of international trade convinced many Japanese that modernization had strengthened the nation.

The influence of nationalism became even more evident through Japan's military successes. The **Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895)** was fought primarily over influence in Korea. The conflict ended in a decisive Japanese victory and the signing of the **Treaty of Shimonoseki** in 1895. China recognised the independence of Korea, ceded Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands to Japan, and agreed to pay a substantial indemnity. The victory demonstrated the effectiveness of Japan's modernization programme and greatly enhanced national confidence.However, shortly after the war, Russia, Germany and France compelled Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China through what is known as the **Triple Intervention.** Many Japanese regarded this action as an unjust attempt by European powers to deny Japan the rewards of its victory. The incident strengthened nationalist sentiment and convinced many political leaders that Japan needed to become even stronger in order to safeguard its national interests.

Japan's growing rivalry with Russia over Korea and Manchuria culminated in the **Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905).** Once again, Japan emerged victorious. The **Treaty of Portsmouth,** signed in 1905, recognised Japan's dominant position in Korea and transferred Russia's leasehold rights in the Liaodong Peninsula and southern Manchuria to Japan. This victory attracted worldwide attention because it marked the first time in the modern era that an Asian country had defeated a major European power in war.

Japan's success had a profound impact beyond its own borders. Nationalist leaders in countries such as India, China and Vietnam regarded Japan's victory as evidence that an Asian nation could successfully modernize and resist Western domination. Thus, Japanese nationalism inspired anti-colonial movements in several parts of Asia during the early twentieth century.

Japan's Expansion in Asia

As Japan's economic and military strength increased, its nationalism gradually assumed a more expansionist character. Many political leaders argued that the country required overseas territories to secure raw materials, obtain new markets for its industries and strengthen its strategic position in East Asia. Nationalism, which had initially developed as a means of preserving independence, increasingly became linked with imperial expansion.

Following the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese influence over Korea expanded rapidly. In **1905,** Korea became a Japanese protectorate, and in **1910** it was formally annexed into the Japanese Empire. Japan also strengthened its position in southern Manchuria and expanded its political and economic influence in China. Supporters of expansion claimed that these policies were necessary for Japan's security and economic development. They also argued that Japan had a special responsibility to lead the modernization of Asia.

However, Japanese rule in its colonies often involved political repression, economic exploitation and restrictions on local culture and identity. Consequently, while Japanese nationalism had contributed significantly to national modernization, it also acquired an imperialist dimension that brought Japan into conflict with neighbouring countries.

By the early twentieth century, Japan had emerged as one of the leading industrial and military powers in Asia. Nationalism had played a central role in strengthening the authority of the Emperor, promoting modernization and fostering national unity. At the same time, it also encouraged imperial expansion, which increasingly shaped Japan's foreign policy and its relations with neighbouring countries. The evolution of Japanese nationalism therefore reflects both its contribution to nation-building and its influence on Japan's emergence as a major power in Asia.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Who is known as the father of modern China?

2. What was the name of the last ruling dynasty of China?
3. In which year did the Meiji Restoration take place?
4. Who was the emperor associated with the Meiji Restoration?

9.5 LET US SUM UP

- Nationalism emerged in Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a response to foreign intervention, political instability and the need for national unity and modernization.
- In China, the decline of the Qing Dynasty, foreign imperialism and the impact of the Opium Wars contributed to the growth of nationalist sentiments. Reformers and revolutionaries, especially Sun Yat-sen, played a key role in promoting nationalism and ending imperial rule. The Revolution of 1911 marked the end of the Qing Dynasty and led to the establishment of the Republic of China. The May Fourth Movement strengthened Chinese nationalism by encouraging patriotism, political awareness and resistance to foreign domination. The Kuomintang (KMT**)** and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) contributed significantly to the nationalist movement despite their ideological differences. Japanese aggression during the 1930s further united the Chinese people and strengthened the nationalist movement.
- In Japan, the arrival of Western powers brought an end to the Tokugawa Shogunate and paved the way for the Meiji Restoration of 1868. The Meiji government introduced important political, administrative, educational, economic and military reforms that transformed Japan into a modern nation-state. Japanese nationalism promoted national unity, loyalty to the Emperor and rapid industrial and military modernization. As Japan became stronger, nationalism increasingly became associated with imperial expansion in East Asia, leading to the annexation of Korea and the expansion of Japanese influence in China. Although nationalism developed differently in China and Japan, it played a decisive role in shaping the political transformation, modernization and emergence of both countries as influential states in modern Asia.

9.6 FURTHER READING

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4. Jansen, M. B. (2000). *The making of modern Japan*. Harvard University Press.
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6. Vinacke, H. M. (1982). *A history of the Far East in modern times*. Kalyani Publishers.

✓ 9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answer to Q1: Sun Yat-sen is known as the father of modern China.
Answer to Q2: The Qing Dynasty was the last ruling dynasty of China.
Answer to Q3: The Meiji Restoration took place in 1868.
Answer to Q4: Emperor Meiji (Emperor Mutsuhito) was the emperor associated with the Meiji Restoration.

? 9.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the major causes for the rise of nationalism in China.
2. Discuss the contributions of Sun Yat-sen to the Chinese nationalist movement.
3. Write a short note on the May Fourth Movement.
4. Explain the significance of the Meiji Restoration.
5. Discuss the major reforms introduced during the Meiji period.
6. How did Japanese nationalism contribute to the modernization of Japan?
7. Discuss the growth and development of nationalism in China.
8. Examine the causes and significance of the Revolution of 1911 in China.
9. Discuss the emergence and growth of nationalism in Japan with special reference to the Meiji Restoration.
10. Explain the political, economic, educational and military reforms introduced during the Meiji period.

UNIT 10: NATIONALISM IN ASIA- II

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Indonesia

10.4 South East- Asia

10.5 Let Us Sum Up

10.6 Further Readings

10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.8 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the emergence and development of nationalist movements in major Southeast Asian countries, including Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaya, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand.
- Analyse the impact of colonialism, Western education, economic exploitation, and the Second World War on the rise of nationalism in Southeast Asia.
- Assess the contribution of prominent nationalist leaders, political organizations, and revolutionary movements in the struggle for independence across Southeast Asia.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

Nationalism in Asia emerged as a powerful response to colonial domination and foreign intervention during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Southeast Asia, nationalist movements developed under different colonial regimes but shared the common objective of achieving political freedom and national self-determination. The spread of Western education, economic exploitation, the growth of an educated middle class, cultural revival, and the impactof global events such as the Second World War played a significant role in awakening nationalist consciousness. This unit examines the rise and development of nationalism in Indonesia andother Southeast Asian countries, including Burma, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Malaya, Singapore, the Philippines, and Thailand. It also highlights the contribution of important leaders, organizations, and movements that shaped the struggle for independence and the emergence of modern nation-states in the region.

10.3 INDONESIA

Indonesia also known as the Dutch East Indies was one of the most valuable colonies of the Netherlands. The Dutch colonial administration controlled the region through a bureaucratic system supported by local rulers and aristocrats.

Origin of Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia

The colonial economy was based on plantation agriculture and export of valuable commodities such as sugar, coffee, rubber, and spices. European companies and colonial officials gained enormous wealth, while the majority of Indonesians remained poor. Indigenous people had very limited political rights and were excluded from higher administrative positions. This colonial environment created social inequalities and dissatisfaction that later encouraged nationalist movements.Western education, economic change, and political awareness created new Indonesian elite. A small group of educated Indonesians were exposed to ideas such as nationalism, democracy and self-determination. They began to question the legitimacy of colonial authority and started to organize political movements demanding reform and greater autonomy.

Political organizations such as nationalist, Islamic, and socialist groups began demanding autonomy and independence. **Budi Utomo** was one of the first Indonesian nationalist organizations founded on May 20, 1908 through the efforts of Mas Wahidin Sudirohusodo, a retired Javanese physician who, attempted to elevate the Javanese people through the study of Western knowledge as well as their own cultural heritage, sought to obtain support for a scholarship fund for Indonesian students. **Sarekat Islam** was another nationalist political party in Indonesia to gain wide popular support. Founded in 1912 the party originated as an association of those Muslim merchants which later emerged as a mass movement combining economic, social, and religious concerns. The **IndonesiaYouth Pledge**, declared on October 28, 1928, united young Indonesians under one homeland, one nation and one language, laying the foundation for national unity and independence. Delegates represented diverse ethnic groups, including Javanese, Sundanese, Batak and Minangkabau and sought to transcend regional and linguistic differences.

Impact of Japanese Occupation (1942-1945)

The Japanese occupation of Indonesia duringSecond World War marked a major turning point in the history of Indonesian nationalism. When Japan defeated the Netherlands in 1942, the Dutch colonial administration collapsed and Japan ruled Indonesia until 1945.Japanese policies had contradictory effects. On the one hand, Japanese rule was extremely harsh. Indonesians were subjected to forced labor, economic exploitation, and strict political control. On the other hand, Japan allowed Indonesian nationalist leaders to participate in political organizations and propaganda campaigns. Leaders such as Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta were given opportunities to mobilize the population. The Japanese alsocreated local military units and administrative organizations that involved Indonesian participation. These institutions provided valuable experience in governance and military organization.

Growth of Nationalist Politics

During the 1920s and 1930s, Indonesian nationalism became more radical and politically organized. A key figure during this period was Sukarno, who founded the Indonesian National Party. Sukarno was a charismatic leader who argued that Indonesia must unite against colonialism and achieve full independence. Another influential leader was Mohammad Hatta, who promoted democratic nationalism and emphasized international cooperation. The Dutch colonial government reacted strongly to these developments. Nationalist leaders were arrested, political parties were banned, and activists were exiled to remote islands. Repression temporarily weakened the nationalist movement, but it did not destroy it. Instead, nationalist ideas continued to spread through underground networks, newspapers, and political discussions.

Declaration of Independence (1945)

Following Japan's surrender in August, 1945, Indonesian leaders acted quickly to declare independence. On 17th August 1945, Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the independence of Indonesia. The proclamation was followed by the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, with Sukarno as president and Hatta as vice president.

- A provisional government was formed and a constitution was adopted. The government also worked to establish diplomatic contacts with foreign countries.
- Administrative institutions were created, including ministries responsible for defense, finance, and foreign affairs. The Indonesian national army was formed and efforts were made to coordinate military resistance. Military units were formed from former Japanese-trained soldiers and local militias.
- However, independence immediately faced challenges. Allied forces, including British troops, arrived in Indonesia to verse the surrender of Japanese forces. At the same time, the Netherlands attempted to restore its colonial authority.

Diplomatic Negotiations

Diplomacy became an increasingly important aspect of the Indonesian struggle for independence. International pressure played a crucial role in ending Dutch colonial rule as the Dutch faced growing international criticism.Indonesian leaders engaged in diplomatic negotiations. Several agreements like the Linggadjati and Renville Agreement were attempted.

- The **Linggadjati Agreement** (Cheribon Agreement) was signed on 15 November 1946 at Linggadjati near Cheribon between the Dutch and the Republic of Indonesia. Under this agreement, the Netherlands recognized the Republic as the de facto authority over Java (including Madura) and Sumatra. Both sides agreed to cooperate in forming a sovereign, democratic, federal United States of Indonesia, which would include the Republic, Kalimantan (Borneo)**,** and the Great East (Dutch East Indies territories). The agreement also proposed the creation of a Netherlands–Indonesian Union, with the Dutch Queen as its head. Both the United States of Indonesia and the Union were to be established by 1 January 1949. It

further stated that disputes between the two parties would be settled through arbitration if not resolved mutually.

- **Renville Agreement** was a treaty signed on Jan. 17, 1948, between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia that concluded on the U.S. warship Renville, anchored in the harbour of Jakarta. It was an attempt to mediate disputes left unresolved by the earlier Dutch-Indonesian settlement, the Linggadjati Agreement of 1946.

Several factors weakened Dutch attempts to maintain control.

Internal Political Conflicts

Different ideological groups competed for influence within the Indonesian Republic. These groups included nationalists, Islamic organizations, and communists.Internal Political struggles emerged between these groups. One of the most serious crises was the Madiun Affair, where communist forces attempted to challenge the Republican government. Problems arose between radicals and moderates. There were regional rebellions and political divisions.Competition among political parties and military factions also led to divisions.

International Involvement

The conflict attracted global attention and was discussed in the United Nations. Many countries supported the Indonesian cause, and international pressure increased on the Netherlands to negotiate a peaceful settlement. The United States played a particularly important role by encouraging the Netherlands to accept Indonesian independence.

Transfer of Sovereignty (1949)

By 1949, continued fighting and international pressure weakened the Dutch position. Negotiations finally led to the Dutch Indonesian Round Table Conference. The Netherlands agreed to transfer sovereignty to Indonesia. In December, 1949, the Netherlands officially recognized Indonesian independence. This marked the end of the Indonesian revolution and the establishment of Indonesia as an independent state. Indonesia emerged as a sovereign state, though many political divisions, economic challenges and regional tensions remained. Despite these problems, the revolution successfully ended colonial rule.

10.4 SOUTH EAST ASIA

Nationalism in Southeast Asia emerged primarily as a response to European colonial domination during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike in Europe, where nationalism often preceded the formation of nation-states, in Southeast Asia it developed under colonial conditions and was closely linked to anti-imperialist struggles. The region was divided among various colonial powers like Britain controlled Burma, Malaya, and Singapore; France dominated Indo-China (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia); and the United States ruled the Philippines. Thailand (Siam) remained formally independent but was influenced by Western powers. Despite differences in political experience, nationalist movements across the region shared common features such as resistance to foreign rule, the rise of educated elites, cultural revival, and the

gradual transformation into mass-based movements. The impact of global events such as the Great Depression (1929) and World War II (1939–1945) further accelerated the growth of nationalism and eventually led to independence in most Southeast Asian countries.

- **Nationalism in Burma**

The rise of nationalism in Burma was closely tied to British conquest. The country was annexed in three stages: the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826), the Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852), and the Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885), which resulted in the complete annexation of Burma and the exile of King Thibaw Min. After 1885, Burma was incorporated into British India, leading to the destruction of traditional political institutions and weakening of Buddhism, which had been closely associated with the monarchy.

Early nationalism in Burma was largely cultural and religious in nature. The formation of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1906 marked the beginning of organized resistance. Initially focused on the preservation of Buddhist traditions and Burmese culture, the YMBA gradually became politicized. The University boycott of 1920 marked a turning point, as students emerged as a major force in the nationalist movement. The General Council of Burmese Associations (GCBA) further strengthened political activism by demanding reforms and self-government.

The movement took a more radical turn with the Saya San Rebellion (1930–1932), a peasant uprising caused by economic hardship, high taxation, and land alienation during the Great Depression. One of the results of the rebellion was the founding of the Dobama Asiayona (Burma for Burmese) whose members were young student nationalists who addressed each other as Thakin. Aung Sang and U Nu were prominent leaders. This organization demanded the separation of Burma from India and independence for Burma. Other important parties were sinyetha (Poor People's Party) founded by Dr. Ba Maw and the Myochit (Patriotic Party) founded by Dr. U. Saw. All these political parties and Burmese leaders were influenced by the freedom struggle carried on by the Indian National Congress in India which served as a source of inspiration to them.

Burma was separated from India by the Government of Burma Act (1935) which came into force on April 1, 1937.Japan propagated the idea that it would offer assistance for Burmese independence. Burmese nationalists initially cooperated with Japan but were soon disillusioned with the oppressive Japanese regime. Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) was formed by Aung Sun under which Burma joined the Allied forces. On January 27, 1947, an agreement reached between British Prime Minister Atlee and General Aung Sun whereby an interim government was established in Burma. Aung Sun and his colleagues were assassinated in July, 1947 and thereafter Thankin Mu became the leader of the AFPFL. He went to London to negotiate Burma's secession where an Anglo-Burmese Treaty was signed by which the British recognized the Republic of Burma as a fully independent state on 4th January 1948.

- **Nationalism in Indo-China: Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia**

Vietnam

The French territories known as Indo-China comprised of the colonies of Cochin China, Protectorates of Tonkin, Annam, Laos and Cambodia. Annam, Tonkin and Cochin China were together called 'Viet Nam". Vietnam became part of French Indo-China in 1887.In the late nineteenth century, resistance to French rule was initially led by Confucian scholars, mandarins, and members of the royal elite. The Can Vuong (Save the King Movement 1885–1896), aimed to restore the Vietnamese monarchy and expel foreign rulers. However, these efforts were largely localized and lacked modern organization, ultimately failing due to superior French military power and lack of coordination. Political group under Prince Cuong De was formed who wrote letters in blood from Japan to urge the people to drive out the French with the help of Japan.Tran Ba Loe and Phan Chau Trinh strongly criticized the colonial rule and wanted reforms. The influence of the Chinese Revolution encouraged Vietnamese intelligentsia to organize political parties. The Revolutionary Party of the Young Vietnam (*Tan Viet Cach Mang Dang*, 1925) and the Nationalist Party of Vietnam (*Viet Nam Quoc-dan Dang*, 1927) were important parties thatwere formed. These parties participated in strikes, and other anti-French activities including the Yenbay Revolt of 1930.The rise of Ho Chi Minh was crucial in shaping Vietnamese nationalism. He founded the Indo-Chinese Communist Party in 1930 after the failure of the Yenbay revolt. They organized strikes, meetings and demonstrations of peasants and workers but the French government crushed that movement.The Japanese occupation during World War II weakened French control and provided an opportunity for nationalist forces. **The Vietnam League** was formed in 1942 which demanded a democratic constitution of Indo-China, a national army, reforms in economy, education, etc., social security and confiscation of Japanese properties. But the French authorities rejected these demands. Thereafter, the Vietnam League started guerilla warfare under Dr. Hi Chi Minh. In August 1945, people rose in armed revolt, overthrew the Japanese puppet government and proclaimed the provisional government of Vietnam with Dr. Ho Chi Minh as its President. On 2 September 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence. However, the French attempted to reassert control, leading to the First Indo-china War (1946–1954). The conflict ended with the Geneva Accords of 1954, which temporarily divided Vietnam into North and South Vietnam. Thus, Vietnamese nationalism combined anti-colonial struggle with communist ideology and armed resistance.

- **Laos**

Nationalism in Laos emerged slowly under French colonial rule due to its limited exposure to modern education and weak political organization. Laos became a French protectorate in 1893bya French-Siamese Treatyand was incorporated into French Indo-China by 1899. The French governed indirectly through the monarchy and local elites, which delayed the development of strong nationalist movements.

In 1945, following World War II and the Japanese occupation of Indo-China and the weakening of French authority, nationalist sentiments began to intensify. This created conditions for the emergence of nationalist movements. In April 1945, King Sisavang

Vong of Luang Prabang claimed independence from the French rule.However, this phase of independence was short-lived. By 1946, French forces had returned and re-established control over Laos, forcing many nationalist leaders into exile. Despite this setback, nationalist activity continued both inside and outside the country. After the Japanese surrender, all Laotian boundaries were united by agreement with France and the name of the kingdom was changed to Laos in August 1947. Nationalist sentiments began to grow which were influenced by events in neighboring Vietnam. The leadership of the Lao Issara (Free Laos) movement played a role in the struggle for independence. In the early 1950s, nationalist activity intensified with the emergence of the Pathet Lao, a communist-led organization that mobilized peasants and resisted French rule. Influenced by developments in Vietnam, it played an important role in the independence struggle. Laos eventually achieved independence on 22 October 1953.

- **Cambodia**

Nationalism in Cambodia developed under French colonial rule but followed a relatively moderate and less militant course compared to other regions of Southeast Asia. Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863 under King Norodom and was later incorporated into French Indo-China in 1887, along with Vietnam and Laos. Under this system, real power remained with the French, while the Cambodian monarchy was retained as a symbolic institution. The French governed indirectly, relying on traditional elites, which limited direct confrontation but also slowed the growth of a strong nationalist movement.

In the early twentieth century, nationalist consciousness in Cambodia remained weak. The country lacked a large educated middle class, and Western education was limited. Early resistance was sporadic and lacked organization. Buddhism played an important role in preserving cultural identity, but unlike in Burma, monks did not initially lead political movements. Nationalist ideas began to spread gradually through contact with developments in neighboring Vietnam and exposure to modern education.

A significant turning point came during World War II (1939–1945).In 1941, Japan occupied Indo-China but allowed French authorities to continue under its control. During this period, King Norodom Sihanouk was placed on the throne by the French. In March 1945, Japan overthrew French control and encouraged local rulers to declare independence. Cambodia briefly declared independence in 1945, which, although short-lived, stimulated nationalist aspirations.

After Japan's defeat in August 1945, the French re-established control over Cambodia. However, nationalist movements began to grow in the post-war period. The most important of these was the Khmer Issarak movement (Free Khmer movement), which emerged in the late 1940s. This movement consisted of loosely organized anti-French groups, including nationalist and leftist elements, and carried out guerrilla activities mainly in rural areas. Despite its efforts, the movement lacked unity and strong leadership, limiting its effectiveness.

The most decisive phase of Cambodian nationalism was led by Norodom Sihanouk, who transformed himself from a French-supported monarch into a nationalist

leader. In the early 1950s, he launched the "Royal Crusade for Independence", using diplomatic pressure and international support to demand independence. He also adopted internal political strategies, such as dissolving the national assembly in 1953, to strengthen his position. Cambodia achieved full independence on 9 November 1953, largely through negotiation rather than prolonged armed struggle. This distinguished Cambodia from Vietnam, where independence was achieved through war. The Geneva Conference of 1954 further confirmed Cambodia's sovereignty and neutrality in the region.

- **Nationalism in Malaya (Malaysia)**

Nationalism in Malaya developed under British colonial rule and was shaped by its multi-ethnic society of Malays, Chinese, and Indians. Unlike more unified movements elsewhere, Malayan nationalism evolved gradually due to ethnic divisions and differing political interests. British control was consolidated in the late nineteenth century, and Malaya became economically important for rubber and tin production.

Early nationalist consciousness emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, largely among the Malay elite, with an emphasis on protecting Malay identity and privileges. At the same time, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), founded in 1930, mobilized mainly Chinese workers and played a significant role in anti-colonial resistance. During World War II (1942–1945), Japanese occupation weakened British authority and strengthened nationalist sentiments.

A major turning point came with the British proposal of the Malayan Union in 1946, which aimed to centralize administration and grant equal citizenship rights. This was strongly opposed by Malays, leading to the formation of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in 1946under leaders like Tunku Abdul Rahman. UMNO became the force of Malay nationalism.

Through negotiations and constitutional reforms, Malaya moved toward self-rule. The Federation of Malaya Agreement (1948) replaced the Malayan Union, restoring Malay privileges. Finally, Malaya achieved independence on 31 August 1957**.**

- **Nationalism in Singapore**

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, political consciousness in Singapore remained limited. The British maintained strict control, and economic prosperity reduced immediate resistance. However, the spread of Western education and the growth of an educated middle class gradually led to the emergence of political awareness. Early associations and reformist groups began to discuss issues of governance and representation, though these remained moderate in nature.

A major turning point came during World War II (1939–1945)**.** Singapore fell to Japanese forces in February 1942, marking a severe blow to British prestige and demonstrating the vulnerability of colonial rule. The Japanese occupation (1942–1945) had a profound impact, as it weakened colonial authority and encouraged nationalist

sentiments among the local population. After Japan's defeat in August 1945, the British returned, but their authority was no longer unquestioned.

The post-war period saw the rapid growth of political movements and trade unions. Labour unrest, strikes, and demands for better working conditions became common, reflecting growing dissatisfaction with colonial rule. The rise of leftist and communist influence, particularly through labour organizations, played an important role in mobilizing the masses. One of the most significant developments was the formation of the People's Action Party (PAP) in 1954,under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew. The PAP combined anti-colonial nationalism with a strong emphasis on social reform and political organization. It successfully mobilized support among workers, students, and the middle class, becoming the leading force in Singapore's nationalist movement.

Political reforms gradually followed. Singapore achieved internal self-government in 1959, with Lee Kuan Yew becoming its first Prime Minister. Although Singapore briefly joined the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, political and ethnic tensions led to its separation. Singapore became a fully independent republic on 9 August 1965.

- **Nationalism in the Philippines**

The Philippines experienced one of the earliest nationalist movements in Asia. Under Spanish colonial rule (1565–1898), an educated elite known as the Ilustrados emerged and began to demand reforms. José Rizal played a key role in inspiring nationalist sentiment through his writings.

The Philippine Revolution of 1896, led by Emilio Aguinaldo, marked the beginning of armed struggle against Spanish rule. Although Spain was defeated in 1898, the Philippines came under American control following the Spanish-American War. Under American rule, nationalism continued to develop through political institutions and education.

The United States gradually introduced self-government, and the Philippines gained independence on 4 July 1946. Nationalism in the Philippines was thus shaped by both Spanish and American colonial experiences and combined reformist and revolutionary elements.

- **Nationalism in Thailand (Siam)**

Thailand (formerly Siam) occupies a unique position in Southeast Asia as it was never formally colonized by European powers. However, it faced significant pressure from Britain and France and undertook reforms to preserve its independence. Kings Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851–1868) and Chulalongkorn (Rama V, 1868–1910) initiated modernization programs, including administrative reforms, legal changes, and the abolition of slavery. These reforms helped strengthen the state and prevent colonization.The 1932 Revolution marked a turning point in Thai history, as it ended absolute monarchy and introduced a constitutional system. Nationalism in Thailand

was largely state-led and focused on modernization, centralization, and the promotion of Thai identity. Unlike other Southeast Asian countries, Thai nationalism developed without direct colonial rule but was influenced by external pressures.

Nationalism in South East Asia began with cultural revival and reform movements before evolving into mass political struggles. Factors such as economic exploitation, Western education, and religious identity played key roles. The impact of World War II weakened colonial powers and accelerated independence movements. While some countries achieved independence through negotiation, others relied on armed struggle. By the 1940s–1950s, most Southeast Asian nations became independent states.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Which organization marked the beginning of organized nationalist resistance in Burma in1906?
Q2: Who founded the Indo-Chinese Communist Party in 1930?
Q3: Which organization became the principal force of Malay nationalism after opposing the Malayan Union in 1946?
Q4: Who inspired nationalist sentiment in the Philippines through his writings?
Q 5: Who led the Philippine Revolution of 1896?
Q 6: In which year did the Philippines gain independence?

10.5 LET US SUM UP

- Nationalism in Indonesia developed as a response to Dutch colonial rule and was strengthened by Western education, political awareness, and organizations such as Budi Utomo and Sarekat Islam, culminating in the Indonesian Revolution and independence in 1949.
- The Japanese occupation (1942–1945) became a turning point in Southeast Asia, weakening European colonial powers, encouraging political mobilization, and accelerating the growth of nationalist movements.
- Nationalist movements in Burma, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia evolved under different colonial conditions but shared the common objective of ending foreign rule through political movements, diplomatic efforts, and, in some cases, armed struggle.
- Western education, economic exploitation, cultural revival, and the emergence of educated middle classes played a significant role in spreading nationalist ideas and mobilizing people against colonial rule.
- Nationalist leaders and organizations, including Sukarno, Mohammad Hatta, Aung San, Ho Chi Minh, Lee Kuan Yew, José Rizal, UMNO, PAP, and the AFPFL, made significant contributions to the struggle for independence in their respective countries.
- By the mid-twentieth century, most Southeast Asian countries had achieved independence, marking the decline of European colonialism and the emergence of sovereign nation-states, although many continued to face political, economic, and social challenges after independence.

10.6 FURTHER READING

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10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA)
Ans to Q2: Ho Chi Minh
Ans to Q3: United Malays National Organisation (UMNO)
Ans to Q4: José Rizal
Ans to Q5: Emilio Aguinaldo
Ans to Q6:1946

10.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Explain the role of organizations like Budi Utomo and Sarekat Islam in the early phase of Indonesian nationalism.
2. Write about the Linggadjati Agreement.
3. Examine the contribution of Ho Chi Minh and the Indo-Chinese Communist Party in shaping Vietnamese nationalism.
4. Analyse the significance of the Malayan Union (1946) and the formation of United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in the development of nationalism in Malaya.
5. Discuss the role of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA**)** and Dobama Asiayone in the growth of nationalism in Burma.
6. Trace the development of nationalism in Laos, focusing on the Lao Issara and Pathet Lao movements.
7. How did colonial rule shape the emergence and character of nationalist movements in Southeast Asia?
8. Compare the nature of nationalism of Singapore with that of Thailand (Siam)

UNIT 11: NATIONALISM IN INDIA – I

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Define: Colonialism, Imperialism and Nationalism

11.4 Approaches: Imperialist, Nationalist, Marxist, and Subaltern

11.5 Let Us Sum Up

11.6 Further Readings

11.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.8 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define the concept of colonialism, imperialism and Nationalism ;
- engage with the approaches with regard to the concept of Imperialism, Nationalism, Marxist and Subaltern Studies .

11.2 INTRODUCTION

Colonialism refers to a system of political, economic, and cultural domination. British colonialism in India rested on a powerful state apparatus, an extractive economy, and a cultural project of control, subordination, and surveillance. Imperialism is the structural expression of capitalism's need for markets and resources. In colonial India, the drain of wealth and deindustrialisation were features of this system.

Nationalism in India is not a single, unified category. It had different phases, social bases, and distinct visions of what Indiameant. The educated middle-class and the Indian National Congress played a crucial role in giving the anti-colonial nationalist movement institutional form, but its mass dimensions drew from peasants, women, workers, local communities, and assertions of caste identity. In this unit you will consider the contribution of four major historiographical approaches to the study of Indian nationalism.

11.3 DEFINE: COLONIALISM, IMPERIALISM AND NATIONALISM

At the most basic level, colonialism is the practice of one country establishing political and economic control over another territory and its people. Colonialism refers to the structural relationship of domination in which the colonised territory is subordinated to the needs of the colonising power. Colonialism is established and characterised by structural violence. In *Capital, Volume 1,* Karl Marx notes: “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the original inhabitants, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the

East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for commercial hunting of black skins, signalised the rosy dawn of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation."

Imperialism is a broader and more contested concept than colonialism. In simple terms, imperialism refers to the building of an empire through the extension of a state's power and authority over other territories. The modern concept of imperialism developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when thinkers tried to explain why the major European powers were competing so aggressively to colonise. The most influential Marxist account was provided by V.I. Lenin in his 1916 pamphlet Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. Lenin defines imperialism as the monopoly stage of capitalism. Lenin views imperialism as a specific, historically transitional phase of the economy where capitalism becomes "moribund" or decaying. Imperialism emerges when the fundamental characteristics of pre-monopoly capitalism transform, and the economy becomes dominated by capitalist monopolies.

Lenin views imperialism as inherently parasitic. The establishment of monopolies creates a tendency toward economic stagnation and decay, as the ability to dictate monopoly prices can temporarily eliminate the drive for technical progress and innovation. The massive export of capital isolates the imperialist country from actual production, creating a "rentier state." Because capital accumulates in a few countries, a distinct class of the bourgeoisie emerges: the rentiers. These are individuals whose profession is complete idleness as they take no part in enterprise or production, and survive merely by "clipping coupons."

Bipan Chandra conceptualises colonialism as a distinct social structure and a specific stage in the historical trajectory of a colonised society. Chandra argues that every facet of a colony, its state institutions, class formations, culture, ideologies, and even historical figures, cannot be understood in isolation. They must be analysed as interconnected components operating within, and dictated by, the overarching colonial structure. Chandra identifies four fundamental, interrelated features that define the colonial system.

According to Chandra, the colony is completely integrated into the global capitalist network, but this integration is inherently complex and subservient.Colonialism, Chandra argues, disrupts the internal linkages of the economy and creates a fragmented, disarticulated domestic economy. The metropolis retains a monopoly on high-technology, high-productivity, high-wage, and capital-intensive production, while the colony is relegated to low-technology, low-productivity, low-wage, and labour-intensive production (primarily raw materials and primary commodities).Further, Chandra asserts that the colonial power systematically appropriates the colony's economic surplus. This is manifested as the drain of wealth and a unilateral transfer of surplus to the metropolis through unrequited or uncompensated exports. By draining this surplus, colonialism structurally starves the economy of the capital required for industrialisation and growth. Finally, foreign political control is crucial as the colonial state is an active, decisive instrument within the colonial structure.

Bernard Cohn, in his *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge,* argues that rather than relying solely on military force and conquest, the colonial state functioned through various "investigative modalities," such as surveying, mapping, and linguistic study, that converted complex social realities into manageable categories and facts. These systems of knowledge collection and production aided the British efforts to classify, categorise, and bind the vast social world of India so that it could be effectively controlled. This knowledge was fundamentally practical, it was deemed necessary for the British to issue commands, collect taxes, maintain law and order, and create further knowledge about their subjects. Cohn identifies six specific investigative modalities that played distinct roles in the colonial project: historiographic modality, observational/travel modality, survey modality, enumerative modality, museologicalmodality, and surveillance modality.

The historiographic modality involved studying the administrative practices of previous Indian states to help the British codify and reinstitute ruling practices for their own colonial state. It included collecting customs and local histories to facilitate land revenue assessment, and it helped construct a legitimising ideological discourse. The British used the observational/travel modality to make a strange and unfamiliar space seem predictable and familiar by recording social types.

The survey was a vast official documentation project ranging from measuring fields to mapping and botanical collection. Surveys covered India on an imaginary grid and classified its zoology, geology, botany, and ethnography, producing knowledge that the colonial state deployed to fix, bound, and settle the country. The enumerative modality sought to produce knowledge through projects like the census. By systematically collecting data on age, caste, religion, and occupation, the colonial state objectified social differences and reified categories, creating a sociological order.

The museologicalmodality treated India as a vast museum filled with ruins, artefacts, and texts to be excavated, collected, and displayed. Cohn notes that the power to define the nature of India's past and to establish canons were among the most significant instrumentalities of rule. The surveillance modality was developed to control individuals and groups, such as thugs, sadhus, and pastoralists, who appeared to wander outside the boundaries of settled society. To identify and control these suspected "criminal" groups, the British organised archives of criminal ethnography and experimented with systematic identification methods, including anthropometry and fingerprinting.

In his Foreword to *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, Nicholas Dirks argues that "cultural technologies of rule" were just as critical to making, sustaining, and strengthening colonialism as the brutal military and economic modes of conquest. He asserts that colonialism was fundamentally a "cultural project of control" where colonial knowledge was not only produced by conquest but actively enabled it. According to Dirks, these technologies of rule set in motion transformations that were as powerful as military conquest. By applying these technologies, the British reconstructed and transformed indigenous cultural forms, creating new categories and binaries that separated the colonisers from the colonised, the "modern" West from the "traditional" East, and Europeans from Asians.

Nationalism

Ernst Renan, a French thinker, defined nation as "a soul, a spiritual principle." For Renan, this spiritual principle is not constituted by race, language, interests, religious affinity, geography, or military necessities. Instead, he views the national spirit as "a vast solidarity, constituted by the sentiment of the sacrifices one has made and of those one is yet prepared to make." Nationalism is a political ideology defined by a shared consciousness of identity loyal to one nation.

The dominant view among historians today is that the nation is not a naturally given entity but a modern construct. The most influential formulation of this position was propounded by Benedict Anderson, who defined the nation as an *imagined community*, one whose members will never meet most of their fellow nationals, yet carry in their minds a shared image of belonging. Eric Hobsbawmput forward the idea of *invented tradition*, arguing that national cultures routinely present as ancient and organic what is actually recent and deliberately constructed. Nationalism is now widely understood as a product of specific historical processes in Europe: the Enlightenment, romanticism, industrial capitalism. Nations in Europe came to be associated with notions of self-determination and sovereignty. This post-Enlightenment modernity is said to have subsequently travelled to Asia and Africa, where it encountered very different social realities. This view is, however, not uncontested.

Recognising nationalism as an imagined construct has important historiographical consequences. Nationalism in this understanding becomes a process. Different social groups may experience that process very differently. In his review of Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities, Ranajit Guha questions the "one-sidedness"of Anderson's conceptualisation of nationalism which traces its origins to print capitalism, especially its applicability to the Indian experience. According to Guha, this mirrors the colonialist interpretation of nationalism. Instead, Guha argues that "nationalism straddled two relatively autonomous but linked domains of politics—an elite domain and a subalterndomain." We will consider Guha's conceptualisation of nationalism further in our discussionon the subaltern approach to nationalism. Historians conventionally divide Indian nationalism into three broad phases: the early ormoderate phase, the radical or extremist phase, and the Gandhian or mass movementphase. While this periodisation is useful, we must note that neat chronological phases tendto ignore internal contradictions and the voice of groups and communities who do not fitcomfortably into the standard narrative.

This understanding has transformed how historians approach the Indian nationalist movement.Historians conventionally divide Indian nationalism into three broad phases: the early or moderate phase, the radical or extremist phase, and the Gandhian or mass movement phase. While this periodisation is useful, we must note that neat chronological phases tend to ignore internal contradictions and the voice of groups and communities who do not fit comfortably into the standard narrative.

Indian nationalism has been studied from different theoretical and ideological standpoints: imperialist positions, liberal nationalist histories, Marxist class analysis, and postcolonial critiques have each produced a strikingly different picture. The

concept of Indian nationalism is not a settled matter. It continues to be debated by scholars, politicians, activists, as well as the public in general.

11.4 APPROACHES: IMPERIALIST, NATIONALIST, MARXIST, AND SUBALTERN

Imperialist Approach

British scholars and administrators viewed the India primarily through the lens of British imperial achievement. Within this imperialist tradition, the emergence of Indian nationalism was not recognised as a political awakening, but rather as a product of colonial rule. By constructing an image of India as a deeply fragmented and stagnant society, imperialist historians sought to justify the necessity of British intervention. Rather than viewing Indian society as dynamic and evolving, colonial historiography reduced it to fixed tropes of race, caste, spirituality, and oriental despotism. The imperialist narrative argued that prior to British arrival, India was merely a collection of warring principalities and fragmented communities completely devoid of any common political identity.

The imperialists rejected the idea of an Indian nationhood. This view was articulated by John Strachey in a speech at Cambridge University, where he asserted that the most fundamental lesson regarding the India was that a unified “India” had never historically existed. He argued that despite the centralising and unifying effects of British administration, it was inconceivable that the inhabitants of disparate regions, such as the Punjab, Bengal, or Madras, would ever share a national identity. The Marquis of Dufferindismissed the concept of an Indian nationality as entirely “fictitious.”Administrators like W.W. Hunter and H.H. Risley attempted to prove this fragmentation by segregating and classifying the population into innumerable tribes and castes.

To legitimise colonial rule as a unifying force, the imperialists emphasised the diversity and disunity of India. According to this framework, it was the British who introduced Indians to the concepts of liberty and self-governance by imposing unity through a single administrative system, common law, and English education. Indian nationalismwas viewed as entirely derivative, having borrowed its vocabulary and aspirations from Western liberalism.

As the Indian nationalist movement began to rise and assert the existence of a unified Indian nation, colonialists found it imperative to counter this narrative. A forceful articulation of this imperialist position was provided by Valentine Chirol in his *Indian Unrest*.Chiroldismissed India as a mere “geographical expression.” He argued that India was a “variegated jumble of races and peoples, castes and creeds” that could never evolve into a nation. In this view, only British rule prevented these divisions from erupting into open conflict.

By treating Indian history as meaningful only in its relation to Britain, this historiography denies that Indians possessed their own traditions of political thought, community organisation, and resistance.Within the imperialist framework, Indians are relegated to the role of passive recipients of British modernity. By framing the rise of

nationalism as a product of Western enlightenment and British intervention, imperialist tradition erases the systemic violence and economic exploitation of colonial rule. This allowed an extractive empire to present itself as a benevolent and civilising force.

Nationalist Approach

The nationalist historiography emerged as a counter to the imperialist discourse. Historians like R.C. Majumdar, K.M. Panikkar, Jadunath Sarkar, K.P. Jayaswal, and Tara Chand sought to recover India's own history in order to demonstrate the depth and vitality of Indian civilisation. There was an attempt to show that nationalism was rooted in India's rich cultural traditions. The nationalist approach celebrated India's civilisational achievements and documented popular resistance to colonial rule. It sought to inspire national pride and in the post-independence period it was effectively the official history of the new nation.

DipeshChakrabartyidentifies two axes on which nationalist historiography was built: objectivity and identity. Chakrabarty shows the tension between the two through a comparison of two historians,Jadunath Sarkar and G.S. Sardesai. While Sarkar was committed to universal standards of historical objectivity, Sardesai wrote with an explicit focus onMaratha national sentiment. Rather than seeing these as contradictions, Chakrabarty reads their co-existence as revealing something important about how academic history was written in a period of politically charged encounters.

The nationalist historical project was not without its tensions and contradictions. By the early twentieth century, it was becoming clear that ahistoriography centred around distinct community identity was struggling to speak for all Indians. It risked alienating different sections of the population. Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, and E.V. Ramaswami Naicker offered powerful critiques of the dominant nationalist narrative. They questioned the politics of nationalism and its historical foundations by challenging the idea of a glorious Hindu past.

The nationalist project needed a more accessible and accommodative historiography for India'sdiverse population. Historians such as R.P. Tripathi, Tara Chand, and Ishwari Prasad responded to this need by writing histories that emphasised unity, shared heritage, and what they termed a syncretic culture. Following the Partition and in the context of ongoing communal tension, the project of writing a unified national history became more urgent than ever. In this sense, nationalist historiography emerged in response to contemporary political concerns.

Marxist Approach

In the 'Communist Manifesto', Marx and Engels declare that : 'the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle. For the Marxists, material conditions of Indian society and class struggle are at the core of the issue. An early proponent of the Marxist position was R. Palme Dutt. In his *India Today*, Duttargues that Indian nationalism arose directly from the social and economic conditions created by imperialism and its system of exploitation. He defines nationalism as fundamentally a national democratic struggle for liberation that is closely intertwined with the class struggle and the agrarian revolt of the Indian masses. According to Dutt, the national

movement contains three main social tendencies: the conservative tendency, the tendency of the industrial bourgeoisie, and the rising tendency of socialism.

Dutt divides the historical development of the Indian national struggle into distinct stages, marked by three great waves of struggle. Eachlevel was marked by a higher degree of mass participation. In its earliest phase, Indian nationalism was restricted to the progressive elements of the upper bourgeoisie, landowners, and intellectuals. However, following the Russian Revolution of 1905, a wave of unrest emerged among the urban petty bourgeoisie and students. This wave did not yet reach the broader masses. Following the shock of the First World War and the 1917 Russian Revolution, the movement transformed into a massive popular revolt that drew in the peasantry and the newly emerging industrial working class. Characterised by Gandhi's leadership, the non-violent non-cooperation campaign, and the Khilafat movement, this period saw unprecedented Hindu-Muslim unity and strikes.The movement was however abruptly aborted by the Congress leadership at Bardoli in 1922.Dutt argues this retreat occurred because the bourgeois leadership was terrified of the awakening mass activity, which threatened propertied class and landlord interests. Sparked by the world economic crisis, the third wave saw the emergence of the industrial working class as an independent force and the introduction of socialist ideology into the political arena Following the three great waves, the movement entered a phase of rebuilding or a period of new awakening.

In his *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, A. R. Desai presents an analysis of Indian nationalism through the Marxist method of historical materialism. For Desai, nationalism is not an abstract sentiment, but a historical phenomenon born out of the profound material and economic transformation of Indian society. He argues that Indian nationalism was the direct outcome of new social material conditions and social forces generated by the British capitalist conquest of India.

Central to Desai's Marxist framework is the concept of class conflict. He characterises Indian nationalism as the result of a conflict of interests between the newly emerging Indian social classes and British imperialism. British capitalism sought to keep India subordinate as an agricultural appendage, which artificially stunted India's independent industrial development. The Indian masses required political and economic freedom to allow their society and productive forces to evolve organically. Desai points out that because the nationalist movement was composed of various classes, each group joined the struggle against British rule to advance its own specific material and economic interests.

Desai argues that the industrial bourgeoisie realised that British rule actively hindered their growth. They supported the nationalist movement to secure fiscal autonomy, protection for Indian industries, and a sovereign state that would allow them to freely expand their capitalist enterprises. The intelligentsia, having assimilated modern democratic and rationalist ideas through Western education, pioneered the nationalist movement. They demanded representative institutions, democratic rights, and the Indianisation of the administrative services which were monopolised by the British. The peasantry and proletariatdemanded a reduction in land taxes, better wages, and an end to their economic exploitation. While these various social classes

had different and sometimes conflicting interests, they were united by the reality that their free economic and social development was not possible under foreign imperialist rule.

A different Marxist reading is provided by Bipan Chandra. Chandra argues that the nationalist movement should not be understood as a bourgeois movement even though the nationalist intellectuals who lead the movement broadly accepted capitalist economics as an ideology. Sumit Sarkar is critical of simplistic class-based explanations, including those of R.P. Dutt. His concern is that both orthodox Marxist accounts and elitist narratives make the same mistake by assuming that political behaviour can be explained too directly and crudely by economic motives. Tracing the history of the idea ofIndia, Irfan Habib has argued that by the xxxxxxxxxxxx of British conquests in 1757, India was recognised not just as a geographical region but as a distinct cultural and political entity. However, Habib reminds us that it is essential to recognise that this idea of India did not develop into a nation.

Subaltern Approach

In the early 1980s, a small but influential group of scholars introduced the concept of the “subaltern” as a radical new analytical category in studying modern Indian history. Drawing from the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, the Subaltern Studies Collectiveled by Ranajit Guhasought to challenge the existing interpretations of India’s nationalist movement. Guha argued that the existing historiography suffered from a severe elitist bias asit neglected the “politics of the people.”For Guha, modern Indian historiography was dominated by an elitism championed by colonialists, bourgeois nationalists, and even orthodox Marxists. Guha characterised the vast body of writing on the nationalist movement as “un-historical,” “blinkered,” and “one-sided” because it silenced subaltern pasts in favour of highlighting the actions of the colonisers and Indian elites. In his *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*, Guha attacked existing histories of peasant rebellions for treating them as purely spontaneousphenomena, like thunderstorms or earthquakes, thereby denying the peasants any conscious agency, will, or rationality.

Mridula Mukherjee observes that though the Subaltern Collective includes much of Marxist historiography in their general list of elite historiography, the influence of the British Marxist school led by E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm is evident. The Subaltern Studies collective also fails to acknowledge the contribution of earlier scholars, including Kathleen Gough, Eric Stokes, Barrington Moore, DN Dhanagare, KN Panikkar, in writing nuanced histories of peasant movementsin India.

As the project moved forward, its theoretical framework shifted significantly influenced by the cultural or post-colonial turn. This shift is evident in the works of Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Partha Chatterjee’s works have received widespread attention. In his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Chatterjee asserts that that nationalist thought in the colonial world is a "derivative discourse," characterised by a profound and inherent contradiction. While it politically challenges colonial rule, it accepts the epistemic dominance of the West. Nationalist thought attempts to assert the autonomous identity and subjectivity of a national culture, yet it does so by adopting the very post-Enlightenment, bourgeois-

rationalist framework of knowledge that justifies colonial domination. Chatterjee argues that because nationalist thought operates within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure mirrors the very colonial power it seeks to challenge, it can never truly do so. Chatterjee traces three historical stages of Indian nationalism: the moment of departure, the moment of manoeuvre, and the moment of arrival.

Sumit Sarkar, an early member of the project who later distanced himself from it, argues that the Subaltern Studies project originally began with a Marxist, radical emphasis on “histories from below”. He critiques the project’s later post-modern turn, characterising it as a departure from material realities in favour of abstract cultural critiques. Sarkar criticises the Subaltern Studies for creating a rigid, absolute separation between the worlds of colonial domination and subaltern autonomy. He argues that the Subaltern Studies reified categories like “subaltern” and “community” into fixed, romanticised, and decontextualized identities, ignoring internal tensions within these groups.

Sarkar directs a significant portion of his critique at Partha Chatterjee. For Sarkar, Chatterjee’s argument that the colonised intelligentsia was so overwhelmed by Western power-knowledge that they were robbed of agency and reduced to producing merely “derivative discourses”, creates a monolithic view of colonial domination that strips the colonised of all agency. Sarkar further argues that by locating women's autonomy strictly within the "spiritual" domain of the hoSme, Chatterjee ignores how indigenous patriarchal structures violently dominated women. Sarkar also stresses that Chatterjee remains entirely silent on powerful anti-caste movements.

Check your progress

Q1. What do you understand by the term “investigative modalities”?
Q2. How do you distinguish between colonialism and imperialism?
Q3. State the main features of the Marxist interpretation of Indian nationalism.
Q4. What is the central argument of the Subaltern Studies approach?
Q5. How did the Imperialist approach interpret Indian nationalism?
Q4. Explain Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as an "imagined community."
Q5. What are Bernard Cohn's "investigative modalities"?

11.5 LET US SUM UP

- Colonialismis a system of political, economic, and cultural domination characterised by structural violence, subordinating the colonised territory to the needs of the colonising power.
- Imperialism involves the broader extension of a state’s power over other territories, which V.I. Lenin defined as the decaying, parasitic “monopoly stage of capitalism”.
- In India, nationalism was not a single, fixed event but a complex process with different phases, drawing mass participation from the educated middle-class, peasants, workers, and women.
- The study of Indian nationalism is highly contested, with four major historiographical approaches: Imperialist, Nationalist, Marxist, and Subaltern.

- The Imperialist approach denied the existence of an Indian nation, framing pre-colonial India as a stagnant and deeply fragmented collection of warring principalities, races, and castes.
- The Nationalist approach emerged to counter imperialist discourse by recovering India's history, celebrating its civilisational vitality, and documenting popular resistance to inspire national pride.
- The Marxist approach, championed by scholars like R. Palme Dutt and A.R. Desai, argues that Indian nationalism was born out of the new material conditions, economic transformations, and class struggles generated by British capitalist exploitation.
- The Subaltern approach, launched by Ranajit Guha, attacked existing historiographies for their severe "elitist bias," seeking instead to place the subaltern classes at the centre of history and recognise the conscious agency of peasant rebels.

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✓ 11.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: The Marxist approach views Indian nationalism as a product of British capitalist exploitation and changing material conditions. Historians such as R. Palme Dutt and A.R. Desai argue that nationalism emerged from class struggles involving peasants, workers, the intelligentsia, and the Indian bourgeoisie.

Ans to Q2: The Subaltern Studies approach, led by RanajitGuha, argues that conventional histories of Indian nationalism are **elitist** because they focus mainly on colonial rulers and nationalist leaders while ignoring the role of peasants, workers, tribal communities, and other marginalized groups.

Ans to Q3: The Imperialist approach denied the existence of a unified Indian nation before British rule. Colonial historians argued that India consisted of fragmented regions, castes, religions, and communities without a common political identity.

Ans to Q4: Benedict Anderson argues that a nation is an "imagined community" because its members will never know or meet most of their fellow citizens, yet they imagine themselves as belonging to the same political community.

Ans to Q5: Bernard Cohn argues that the British colonial state governed India through various "investigative modalities" or systems of knowledge production. These included surveys, censuses, mapping, historiography, museums, and surveillance.

? 11.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Define nationalism.
2. How does Bipan Chandra characterise colonialism?
3. “Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest that first established power on foreign shores.” Discuss in the context of colonialism in India.
4. What did Lenin mean by imperialism as “the highest stage of capitalism”?
5. Compare the nationalist and Marxist frameworks to understand the history of Indian nationalism.
6. What is the central argument of the Subaltern Studies project? How did the Subaltern Studies Collective contribute to the study of nationalism in India?

UNIT 12: NATIONALISM IN INDIA-II

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Ideas of Nationalism

- Gandhi
- Tagore

12.4 Critiques

12.5 Let Us Sum Up

12.6 Further Readings

12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.8 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the critique of twentieth-century nationalism as developed by Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore,
- analyse Gandhi's idea of accommodative nationalism and Tagore's vision of internationalism.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

While tracing the historical evolution of patriotism and nationalism, Johan Huizinga, in his lesser-known yet insightful work *Men and Ideas*, argued that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century nationalism had acquired the character of a powerful drive to dominate—an urge to possess one's own nation, one's own state, and to assert it above, over, and at the cost of others. This aggressive turn of nationalism was visible in India as well during the same period in the rise of 'extremism' and 'revolutionary terrorism,' represented at the all-India level by leaders such as Bal GangadharTilak and AurobindoGhosh respectively. Such aggressiveness in the idea of nationalism unsettled many contemporary thinkers across the globe. In the Indian context, it was Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore who most systematically articulated a critique of this dominant strand of nationalism.

Both Gandhi and Tagore were remarkably original yet contrasting in their approaches to the critique of contemporary nationalism. For Tagore, imperialism was the external manifestation of nationalism's inherent aggressiveness, and thus he envisioned an alternative in the form of *internationalism*—a movement beyond the narrow confines of national identity towards a universal humanism. Gandhi, by contrast, sought not to transcend nationalism but to redefine it: he internalized the idea

of internationalism within the framework of nationalism itself, broadening its scope and imbuing it with values of inclusiveness, tolerance, and moral responsibility.

12.3 IDEAS OF NATIONALISM: GANDHI, TAGORE

- **Gandhi**

To begin with Gandhi's ideas on nationalism, a statement published in *Young India* (18 June 1925) illustrates how he sought to establish harmony between the seemingly divergent concepts of individualism, kinship ties, regionalism, nationalism, and internationalism:

> *"The individual has to die for the family, the family has to die for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, and the province for the country; even so, a country has to die, if necessary, for the benefit of the world."*

For Gandhi, therefore, the problem did not lie in nationalism per se but in its degeneration into narrowness, selfishness, and exclusiveness—the true bane of modern nations.

Gandhi's seminal work *Hind Swaraj* (1909) also embodies his distinctive conception of nationalism. The very title of the booklet—*Hind Swaraj*—signifies not merely *swaraj* or self-rule, but also *Hind*, that is, India as a nation. At the time of writing*Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi was acutely aware of those who celebrated violence and aggression in the name of the nation, and it was to them, in particular, that his arguments were directed. As Anthony J. Parel has observed, Gandhi in *Hind Swaraj* engaged with four fundamental questions concerning the Indian nation and nationalism, dispersed across the text. First, he countered the colonial claim that India was not a nation. Second, he explored the relationship of religion and language to the idea of the nation. Third, he assessed the contributions of the Indian National Congress to the evolution of Indian nationalism up to 1909, critically evaluating both its extremist and moderate strands. Finally, he scrutinized the so-called nationalist elites of the time—lawyers, doctors, and the newly educated intelligentsia—whose roles, in his view, often undermined rather than advanced the national cause. In addressing these questions, Gandhi repeatedly reaffirmed his broader vision of the nation and nationalism.

Beginning with the first question, Gandhi critiques those who argued that India, prior to British rule, was not a nation. Such critics claimed that it was the British who, for the first time, unified the scattered and often antagonistic regions and communities of the subcontinent by thoroughly conquering them and establishing what has been described as *Pax Britannica*—the so-called "peace of the British Empire." They further held that modern technologies such as the railways and telegraph were indispensable in forging India into a nation. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi offers a systematic rebuttal of these assumptions. For him, India had been a nation long before the advent of British rule, a fact borne out by two enduring attributes of Indian civilization: first, its remarkable capacity for accommodation and assimilation; and second, the network of

pilgrimage sites spread across the subcontinent, which for centuries had served as cultural and spiritual bonds uniting diverse regions and communities.

According to Gandhi, for any country to be regarded as a *nation*, it must possess the capacity to accommodate differences—that is, its people must nurture a sense of belonging to a common community despite their individual diversities. In this respect, Gandhi's reflections seem to anticipate the essence of Benedict Anderson's later theory of the nation as an "imagined community," conceived as both inherently sovereign and limited. Gandhi held that no other civilization demonstrated such a profound capacity for accommodation as Indian civilization, which for centuries had absorbed and assimilated diverse cultures and religions, making them its own.

Let us Know

Mahatma Gandhi chose to employ the term *praja* (literally "subject"), rather than *rashtra*, as the Gujarati/Hindi counterpart of the English "nation." While *rashtra* connotes power and political authority, *praja* emphasizes people and community, thus aligning more closely with his vision of the nation as a moral and cultural fellowship. Gandhi further drew upon the concept of *sama* (occasional gatherings) to underscore the accommodative character of the Indian nation. As Anthony J. Parel has pointed out, Gandhi's use of *sama* resonates with Ernest Renan's celebrated idea of "fusion," articulated in his 1882 lecture *What is a Nation?*, where Renan argued that the fusion of diverse peoples was a precondition for the formation of European nations.

Gandhi further highlighted the crucial role played by wandering *acharyas* (ascetics) and the network of pilgrimage centres in nurturing the accommodative character of Indian civilization. These *acharyas*travelled across the length and breadth of the subcontinent, usually on foot or in bullock carts, and the very slowness of their journeys enabled them to establish intimate contact with local communities wherever they went. In doing so, they fostered a shared consciousness that transcended regional and cultural boundaries. At the same time, they strategically established pilgrimage centres in every part of India—from North to South and East to West—thereby embedding a cultural and spiritual geography of unity.

For ordinary people, journeys to these distant pilgrimage sites created similar opportunities for interaction and mutual recognition. Pilgrims, while traveling slowly and meeting diverse groups along the way, developed a sense of common belonging with people of different languages, geographies, and ethnic origins. In Gandhi's view, this "slowness of movement" was itself a vital factor in cultivating a national consciousness across a vast and diverse land.

Modern technology, however, disrupted this organic process. With the coming of railways, pilgrimage was reduced to a mechanized act, stripping it of the experiential encounters that fostered accommodation and mutual understanding. As Gandhi argued, the railway system not only diminished the spiritual significance of pilgrimage—turning many holy sites into mere tourist destinations—but also eroded the very processes through which a community consciousness had historically been nurtured. In this sense, modern technologies such as railways inhibited, rather than enhanced, the growth of the accommodative spirit essential to every national community.

Moving to the second aspect, Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, also addressed the crucial issue of the relationship between religion and language in the making of a nation. Many people at the time believed that India would cease to be "one" nation once British rule ended. This skepticism arose largely from India's multi-religious composition—a concern that, in many ways, continues to echo in contemporary times. Gandhi, however, saw in this diversity not a liability but a unique opportunity for India to present a novel example before the world. As he wrote in *Hind Swaraj*: *"India cannot cease to be one nation simply because people belonging to different religions live in it."*

To grasp Gandhi's assumption, it is important to understand what he meant by religion. According to him, every religion has two dimensions: the core (inner) and the periphery (outer). The periphery relates to the social organization and outward practices of the community, whereas the core consists of the ethical principles that guide it. While outward forms of religions may differ, Gandhi argued that at the core all religions share the same ethical foundations. Once individuals begin to recognize this common core, communal tensions would naturally subside, making possible the existence of a nation inhabited by multiple religious groups.

Indeed, Gandhi even turned the conventional argument on its head, asserting that *"in no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms."* If that were true, he pointed out, then the entirety of Europe would constitute a single nation—something history clearly disproves.

Turning to the relationship between language and nation, Gandhi acknowledged that any nation requires a *lingua franca* to enable communication among its multi-lingual and multi-dialectal inhabitants. In India's case, while he recognized the utility of English in serving this purpose, he firmly rejected its continuation. Over time, Gandhi argued, English had ceased to be a neutral medium of communication and had instead become a hegemonizing tool. It was no longer "just" a language; knowledge of English had begun to function as a means of accessing administrative posts, power, and privileges.

For this reason, Gandhi advocated the development of a new *lingua franca* for India, one free from the hegemonizing tendencies of English. At the same time, he stressed the importance of mutual exchange between linguistic communities: for instance, a North Indian should learn at least one South Indian language and vice versa; similarly, a Hindu should study Urdu, Arabic, or Persian, while a Muslim should attempt to learn Sanskrit.

However, Gandhi insisted that such exchanges must not lead to the neglect of one's own mother tongue. On the contrary, individuals should value and enrich their mother tongue, seeing it as the foundation of their cultural and moral identity.

Thirdly, Gandhi examined the role of the Indian National Congress in shaping India as a nation. For him, the Congress was the pioneering association that brought together people from nearly all regions of India and across diverse communities. To illustrate this, Gandhi, in *Hind Swaraj*, referred to three national leaders—Naoroji, Gokhale, and Taiyebji—a Parsi, a Hindu, and a Muslim, respectively. By foregrounding this trio, Gandhi implicitly underscored his claim about the inherently accommodative character of Indian civilization.

Hind Swaraj also engages with the contemporary debate between the Moderate and Extremist factions within the Congress. Gandhi conceded that the Moderates were excessively polite in demanding their rightful claims, yet he equally rejected the tactics of the Extremists. His reasoning was that if *swaraj* (self-rule) were achieved through extremist methods, "English rule would vanish but Englishness would prevail." Such a trajectory, he warned, would only reproduce a violent form of nationalism and nation-state—of the kind that had already oppressed India for nearly two centuries under British imperialism.

Gandhi's critique of Extremism was sharp and metaphorical: they desired "the tiger's nature, but not the tiger"; they sought to make "India like England." To this, he responded unequivocally: *"When it becomes England, it will be called not Hindustan, but Englistan. This is not the swaraj that I want."*

In the above statement one can clearly discern Gandhi's critique of the Western concept of nationalism with its inherent aggressiveness. Gandhi, in contrast, envisioned an *Indian* form of nationalism—one that was more accommodative and deeply rooted in indigenous traditions and cultures, rather than being borrowed from Western models. In this regard, he openly condemned the Extremists, who drew inspiration from the violent methods of Italian nationalists such as Garibaldi and Cavour in their struggles for nation-building and *swaraj*.

The final theme that Gandhi addressed in his critique of nation and nationalism in *Hind Swaraj* concerns the so-called national elites—lawyers, doctors, and the modern professional classes more generally. Gandhi argued that the interests of these elites did not necessarily align with those of the *praja* (the common people). On the contrary, he foresaw the danger of these groups exploiting, deceiving, and oppressing the masses in the name of the nation—something he suggested was already beginning to happen, and which remains relevant today.

Gandhi elaborated this critique in two chapters of *Hind Swaraj*: *"The Condition of India: Lawyers"* and *"The Condition of India: Doctors."* For him, modern professionals—whether doctors, lawyers, scientists, administrators, elected representatives, or business executives—who claimed to be the torchbearers of nationalism were, in reality, motivated by modern objectives: the relentless pursuit of wealth, status, and influence under the guise of serving the nation. In Gandhi's view, genuine *swaraj* could never be achieved so long as the nation remained captive to these "symbols of modern civilization."

It was in this context that Gandhi advanced his ideal of *self-sufficiency* as the foundational trait of a true nation. He later elaborated this idea in his writings and programmes: *Key to Health* (to counter dependence on modern medicine and doctors), the constructive village programmes, and his advocacy of the Panchayat system (to reduce reliance on lawyers, modern bureaucrats, and professional politicians).

Thus, Gandhi outlined his own distinctive conception of nationalism and of the nation itself—radically different from the dominant theories of the early twentieth century. To sum up, what he offered in *Hind Swaraj* was the blueprint for the "India of his dreams."

- **Tagore**

Moving towards Rabindranath Tagore, he regarded imperialism as the outward manifestation of nationalism and hence cherished the idea of *internationalism*, rising above the narrow confines of national identity. Yet, Tagore was not opposed to the idea of the nation and nationalism from the very beginning. In fact, during the first decade of the twentieth century, he emerged as a passionate advocate of nationalism, inspiring many through his writings and initiatives. His disillusionment, however, began to set in during the later phase of the Swadeshi movement, when tendencies of political extremism and revolutionary terrorism increasingly came to the fore. It was in this context that Tagore suddenly withdrew from the political arena at the height of the Swadeshi agitation. Notably, when Abla Bose (wife of the renowned scientist J.C. Bose) wrote to him in 1908, questioning why he appeared disturbed when the movement was gaining strength against colonial oppression—ironically drawing inspiration from his constructive programmes and *Atmashakti*—Tagore responded with characteristic conviction: *"Patriotism cannot be our final shelter; my refuge is humanity."*

Tagore's disillusionment with nationalism deepened further during the second decade of the twentieth century, as he witnessed its destructive manifestations across the world—Japan's violent aggression against China, Europe's march toward the global conflagration of 1914–18, and the recurring outbursts of 'revolutionary terrorism' in India. From this point onwards, Tagore emerged as one of the fiercest critics of nationalism. He argued that nationalism was nothing more than the appropriation—by brute force if necessary—of the wealth and resources of other nations, and that its inevitable consequence would be isolationism and the betrayal of humanity's highest ideals.

Referring to the aggressive turn that nationalism had taken in India and across the world in the early twentieth century, Tagore warned that it threatened to destroy civilization itself. For him, nationalism had been stripped of its human dimension and was destined to create a new form of bondage, ironically in the very name of freedom and the right to self-determination. Yet this critique did not imply that Tagore had abandoned his anti-imperialist convictions. As AshisNandy observes in *The Illegitimacy of Nationalism*, Tagore consistently opposed imperialism throughout his life even as he rejected nationalism. It was precisely this position, Nandy argues, that baffled many of Tagore's contemporaries in India, for whom nationalism, patriotism, and anti-imperialism appeared inseparably bound together.

Nevertheless, it was not only the violent and aggressive forms of nationalism that Tagore opposed; he was equally sceptical of the non-violent nationalism embodied in Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. Tagore described this as a kind of 'parochial nationalism' that fostered an insular and constricted view of the country. On this question, a fascinating debate unfolded between Tagore and Gandhi—brilliantly captured by Romain Rolland in his biography of Gandhi and in his diary, where he records C.F. Andrews' reflections on the differences between the two thinkers. Tagore's central conviction was that, in the prevailing climate, nationalism was inevitably destined to turn violent, and hence it was better to abandon the concept altogether rather than attempt to reform it. For him, it was futile to generate such passion for an

idea (nationalism) that had no equivalent expression in India's own languages—a reminder, in his view, of the fundamentally Western origins of the concept.

Tagore's anxiety was sharpened by the example of Japan, whose transformation into an imperialist power he found deeply alarming. To him, nationalism lay at the root of Japan's betrayal of its own cultural heritage of restraint and non-aggression. During his visit to Japan, Tagore did not hesitate to openly condemn the country for imitating the aggressive posture of the West and behaving like a 'western nation' forsaking its own civilizational values.

According to Tagore, the modern nation-state, born in the post-religious laboratory of industrial capitalism, is essentially an *"organization of politics and commerce"* designed to secure *"harvests of wealth"* and indulge in *"carnivals of materialism"* by spreading the tentacles of greed, selfishness, power, and prosperity. For him, the nation was not—as many believed—*"a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being."* Rather, it was a *"political and commercial union of a group of people, congregating to maximize their profit, progress, and power."* In other words, it represented *"the organized self-interest of a people where it is least human and least spiritual."*

These observations, articulated in his celebrated work *Nationalism* (1916)—a collection of three lectures delivered in Japan, the United States, and India—capture Tagore's most systematic critique of the modern form of 'nation' and its corrosive impact on humanity.

Tagore further observed that nations are generally bound together by economic interests, geographical boundaries, a shared territory, and common heredity. Yet, once thus consolidated, the spirit that comes to dominate is not cooperation but conflict and conquest. The nation thereby turns into what Tagore called a *"geographical demon"*—a selfish entity that pursues power, wealth, and prestige at the expense of others. In doing so, this demon fosters within its people both a false pride in their own race and nation and a corresponding hatred toward others.

Commenting on this critique, Mohammad Quayum in his essay *Imagining One World* argues that the very fact that the nation-state is a mechanical organization, designed with utilitarian objectives in mind, made it unpalatable to Tagore, who consistently championed creation over construction, imagination over reason, and the natural over the artificial. In other words, for Tagore, the fundamental problem with the modern nation lay in its artificiality and its lack of humanness.

This distinction is vividly captured in Tagore's contrast between pre-modern forms of government and the government of the modern nation-state. As he explained, *"the difference between the two is the same as the difference between the handloom and the powerloom. While in the products of the handloom the magic of man's living fingers finds expression, and its hum harmonizes with the music of life, the powerloom is relentlessly lifeless, accurate, and monotonous in its production."*

Let us Know

Tagore's views on nation and nationalism also found rich expression in his literary works—novels, poems, and essays. AshisNandy, in this context, has offered a

perceptive analysis of three of Tagore's most celebrated novels: *Gora* (1908–09), *Ghare-Baire* (1916), and *Char Adhyaya* (1934). According to Nandy, Tagore's critique of nationalism unfolded on different planes in these works: at the politico-psychological level in *Gora*, at the politico-sociological level in *Ghare-Baire*, and at the politico-ethical level in *Char Adhyaya*.

In place of the mechanical conception of nation and nationalism, Tagore advanced his own idea of *swadeshi samaj*—a community grounded not in impersonal organization but in bonds of love, cooperation, and mutual care; a society where each individual could live in harmony with others and with the wider world. His internationalism, therefore, was not the socialist or Marxist version of workers uniting across national boundaries, but a spiritual internationalism—rooted in the harmony of diverse races, religions, and cultures.

12.4 CRITIQUES

In his article, Joginder Singh Saklani examines the complex relationship between Marxism and nationalism by analysing the evolution of Marxist thought on the "nationality question." He argues that nationalism and Marxism are philosophically distinct. Nationalism considers the nation as the primary source of identity and political loyalty, whereas Marxism regards class divisions as the fundamental basis of society and advocates the unity of the international working class.

Debates among later Marxist thinkers, differ on whether nationalism was merely a temporary phase of capitalist development or a continuing political force. While classical Marxism envisioned the eventual decline of nationalism in favour of proletarian internationalism, twentieth-century Marxists acknowledged that anti-colonial and national liberation struggles often became essential vehicles for resisting imperialism. This led Marxist theory to distinguish between **oppressive nationalism**, which serves imperial or bourgeois interests, and **progressive nationalism**, which seeks liberation from colonial rule and foreign domination.

Saklani states that the Marxist approach to nationalism evaluates nationalist movements according to their historical context, class character, and relationship to imperialism and social revolution.

Marxist critique of Gandhian national movement also makes for an interesting approach. Marxist thinkers argue that Gandhi's ideology ultimately served the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie and landlords rather than the working classes. Among the earliest and most influential critics was M. N. Roy, whose writings provided a systematic Marxist assessment of Gandhian politics.Roy argued that Gandhi's nationalism was rooted in moral and religious principles rather than scientific socialism. He believed that Gandhi's emphasis on truth, non-violence, trusteeship, and class harmony diverted attention from the structural exploitation inherent in capitalist society. According to Roy, the doctrine of trusteeship encouraged wealthy capitalists to act as benevolent guardians of labour instead of challenging private ownership of the means of production. This, he contended, preserved existing class relations and weakened the revolutionary potential of workers and peasants.

Marxist scholars also criticised Gandhi's rejection of class struggle. While Gandhi viewed conflict between labour and capital as morally undesirable and sought reconciliation through dialogue and mutual cooperation, Marxists regarded class conflict as an inevitable consequence of capitalist exploitation. They argued that independence from British rule alone could not liberate the masses unless it was accompanied by radical socio-economic transformation through land redistribution, workers' rights, and collective ownership of productive resources.

Marxist historians such as R. Palme Dutt argued that the leadership of the national movement remained fundamentally bourgeois, limiting the scope of anti-imperialist struggle to political independence while leaving economic inequalities largely intact. Likewise, A. R. Desai maintained that Indian nationalism reflected the aspirations of emerging capitalist classes, with Gandhi acting as a mediator between competing social interests rather than an advocate of proletarian revolution.

A. R. Desai, one of India's foremost Marxist sociologists, viewed Indian nationalism through the lens of historical materialism and class relations. He argued that nationalism was not merely an emotional or cultural movement but a product of the economic and political transformations introduced under colonial capitalism. According to Desai, British colonialism unintentionally created the material conditions for the rise of Indian nationalism by integrating the economy, expanding modern education, introducing railways and communication networks, and fostering new social classes such as the bourgeoisie, industrial workers, and the educated middle class.

Desai maintained that the Indian national movement was led primarily by the Indian bourgeoisie, whose principal objective was to replace colonial rule with a capitalist nation-state that would safeguard its own economic interests. Although the movement mobilised peasants, workers, and other oppressed groups, their participation was carefully controlled by the leadership to prevent demands for radical social and economic transformation. As a result, the nationalist struggle remained largely political rather than socio-economic.

Desai was particularly critical of Mahatma Gandhi's ideology. He argued that Gandhi's emphasis on non-violence, trusteeship, village self-sufficiency, and class harmony diverted attention from the realities of class exploitation. Instead of encouraging workers and peasants to challenge capitalist and landlord domination, Gandhi sought reconciliation between social classes, thereby protecting bourgeois interests. From a Marxist perspective, Desai believed that genuine liberation required class struggle and socialist transformation rather than moral reform.

After Independence, Desai argued that the Indian nation-state did not fundamentally alter the colonial economic structure. Although it adopted democratic institutions and developmental planning, the state continued to protect capitalist and landlord interests. Economic inequalities, poverty, landlessness, and labour exploitation persisted because the state functioned as an instrument of the dominant classes rather than as a neutral representative of the people. The promise of social justice remained limited by the capitalist character of the postcolonial state.

In a similar vein, subaltern school of historiography led by Ranajit Guha emphasizes that the organized national movement that was led by Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress and which eventually culminated into the formation of an Indian nation-state was 'hollow nationalism' of the elites, whereas the 'real nationalism' was that of the masses whom it calls the 'subaltern'. Disenchanted with the form and narrative of nationalism as propounded by the Congress and its embodiment in the Indian state, the subaltern scholars reject the theory that popular mobilization was the result of either economic conditions or initiatives from the top. They claim to have discovered a popular domain of Indian nationalism which was autonomous. As argued, its autonomy was rooted in conditions of exploitation and its politics was opposed to the elites. This domain of the subaltern has been defined by perpetual resistance and rebellion against the elites.

Here it should be kept in mind that the Subaltern historians did not simply dismiss Gandhi or the nationalist movement. Rather, they questioned the idea that the Indian national movement was a unified, homogeneous struggle directed from above by the Congress leadership. Ranajit Guha, particularly in Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India and his essays in the Subaltern Studies series, argued that the politics of the subaltern classes possessed an autonomous domain that could not be reduced to the initiatives of the nationalist elite. In this regard, as delineated by Shahid Amin in his essay 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern U.P., 1921-22', there was no authorized dissemination of the 'sandesh' (or the message) of the Mahatma and the Congress at the village level. Instead, the subalterns interpreted it as per their own locale and milieu. From this perspective, Gandhi was enormously successful in mobilising ordinary people, but the participation of peasants and other subaltern groups often involved aspirations and understandings that were different from those of Gandhi and the Congress. During the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), for example, peasants could interpret swaraj in terms of relief from landlords, moneylenders, taxes, forced labour or other local forms of oppression. Thus, what Congress leaders conceived as a disciplined anti-colonial movement could acquire local and class-specific meanings when it reached the countryside. In other words, nationalism was not simply transmitted from Gandhi and Congress to the masses; it was actively reinterpreted by ordinary people.

Similarly, Partha Chatterjee in his work Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World (1986), argues that anti-colonial nationalism in countries such as India emerged within an intellectual framework already structured by Western modernity. Colonial rule established Europe as the supposed model of modernity, and nationalist thinkers initially attempted to appropriate the very categories-nation, state, progress, science, rationality and political freedom-through which the West claimed superiority. His central argument is that Indian nationalism was "derivative" in the sense that its political discourse often borrowed the conceptual categories of European nationalism even while opposing colonial rule.

However, Chatterjee does not reduce Indian nationalism to imitation. He identifies an important strategy through which nationalists sought to establish an autonomous cultural domain. He famously distinguishes between:

- The material domain science, technology, economy, administration and the modern state, where colonial superiority was difficult to challenge.
- The spiritual domain culture, religion, family, language and social identity, where nationalists claimed an autonomous Indian sphere.

Furthering the arguments of Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakrabarty in his book Provincializing Europe (2000) also argues that the Indian nationalist movement necessarily engaged with concepts such as nation, citizenship, liberty, democracy and sovereignty, many of which had been developed within European political thought. But Chakrabarty cautions against concluding from this that Indian nationalism was merely an imitation of Europe. Indian political modernity was heterogeneous. It contained modern political institutions alongside older social relationships, religious practices, community identities and different conceptions of time. Therefore, Indian nationalism cannot be adequately understood as a failed or incomplete European nationalism. Rather, it provincialized Europe in many ways. It is here that Gandhi assumes tremendous significance for Chakrabarty because Gandhian politics exposed the limitations of the conventional European model of modernity and nationalism. For Chakrabarty, Gandhian ideals represent a different trajectory of modern political thought, rather than merely an Indian adaptation of European nationalism.

Furthermore, an important critique of Gandhi led national movement has been offered by the feminist scholars. While they do not deny Gandhi's enormous role in bringing women into anti-colonial politics, they examine the limits, contradictions and gendered assumptions within Gandhian nationalism. Feminist historians ask whether women entered the national movement as autonomous political subjects or whether their participation was ultimately framed within ideals of sacrifice, motherhood, morality, domesticity and service. Gandhi brought activities traditionally associated with women's domestic lives-spinning, household production, sanitation, care work and simplicity-into nationalist politics. This was empowering in one sense because the home became a site of political action. But the limitation, argue the feminist scholars, was that women were often expected to enter politics without abandoning their traditional responsibilities. Hence, Gandhian nationalism opened the public sphere to women, but it did not necessarily dismantle the patriarchal structures that defined their position within the family and society. This makes the legacy of Gandhi for women's emancipation deeply paradoxical.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What did Mahatma Gandhi mean by accommodative nationalism?
2. What was Rabindranath Tagore's criticism of nationalism?
3. What is Tagore's concept of *Swadeshi Samaj*?
4. What was M. N. Roy's Marxist criticism of Gandhi's nationalism?

12.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have learnt about -

- The critique of early 20th century nationalism, particularly its aggressive, exclusionary and imperialistic tendencies, through the ideas of Gandhi and Tagore.
- Gandhi did not reject nationalism but sought to redefine it through inclusiveness, tolerance and accommodation.
- Tagore was critical of nationalism particularly its association with violence.
- Marxists critiqued Gandhi for promoting class harmony rather than confront capitalist and exploitation.

12.6 FURTHER READINGS

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12.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Gandhi believed that Indian nationalism should be based on inclusiveness, tolerance, and mutual accommodation rather than aggression or exclusion. According to him, India's strength lay in its ability to assimilate diverse religions, languages, and cultures into a common national community.

Ans to Q2: Tagore regarded modern nationalism as aggressive, materialistic, and imperialistic. He believed that it promoted conflict, exploitation, and hatred among nations. Instead of nationalism, he advocated internationalism, emphasizing universal human values, cooperation, and harmony among all people.

Ans to Q3: *Swadeshi Samaj* refers to Tagore's vision of a community based on love, cooperation, mutual care, and cultural harmony rather than political power or economic competition.

Ans to Q4: Roy criticised Gandhi's ideas of non-violence, trusteeship, and class harmony for protecting capitalist interests and preventing workers and peasants from challenging class exploitation through revolutionary struggle

1.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss crucial role played by wandering *acharyas* (ascetics), as delineated by Mahatma Gandhi, in nurturing Indian variant of nationalism?
2. Explain Rabindranath Tagore's idea of *swadeshi samaj*.
3. Delineate Mahatma Gandhi's opinion about relationship between language and nation.
4. Why Tagore was alarmed with Japanese nationalism as manifested in twentieth century?
5. According to Tagore, the modern nation-states are born in the post-religious laboratory of industrial capitalism. Elucidate.
6. Examine Mahatma Gandhi's idea of accommodative nationalism as contained in his seminal text *Hind Swaraj*.
7. Discuss Tagore's disillusionment with modern form of nationalism and his alternative vision of internationalism.

UNIT 13: NATIONALISM IN INDIA – III

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Regionalism

13.4 Sub-regionalism

13.5 Case Study: North East India

13.6 Let Us Sum Up

13.7 Further Readings

13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.9 Model Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Define the concepts of region and regionalism
- Discuss the contentious issue of sub-nationalism
- Engage with these concepts through specific examples from the north eastern region of India

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will consider two key concepts of regionalism and sub-nationalism. In doing so, we will explore their complex relationships with Indian nationalism. You will learn how these two theoretical concepts actually play out in the context of the various states of North East India.

13.3 REGIONALISM

The study of regions and regionalism in South Asia received critical attention in an edited volume titled *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies*. This volume was based on a 1966 symposium organised at the Duke University. Bernard Cohn defines a region not simply by its physical geography, but primarily through non-physical phenomena. Cohn categorises regions into four types: historical regions, linguistic regions, cultural regions, and structural regions. Historical regions are areas where significant groups hold shared sacred myths and symbols regarding their past and their geographical space. Linguistic regions are areas sharing a recognised literary language whose standardised form is identified with by the educated groups within that territory. Cultural regions are areas defined by widely shared cultural traits and patterned behaviours among common people, such as specific rituals, festivals, or dress codes. Finally, structural regions are areas characterised by specific groups of

associated structural variables, such as variations in the caste ranking system, which differentiate them from other areas.

Cohn emphasises that regions are not fixed, or purely objective entities. Rather, they are of a changing nature through time, and their boundaries depend heavily upon where the observer stands and the specific purpose of their study.He defines regionalism as the “conscious or unconscious development of symbols, behaviours, and movements which will mark off groups within some geographic boundary from others in other regions for political, economic, or cultural ends.”According to Cohn, the cycle of regionalism in India was triggered by modernisation and westernisation, and intensified by the 20th-century nationalist movement.

In the same volume, Burton Stein objected to Cohn’s category of historical regions,arguing that it is a "naively” given concept. He notes that Cohn uses geographic/physical criteria for historical regions while claiming social scientists should not rely on physical phenomena. Stein also rejects Cohn’s claim that Indian regionalism began with modernisation and westernisation. Stein argues that regionalism as a cultural process has a much longer history in India. He traces the conscious manipulation of regional symbols back to the 12thcentury Bhakti movement’s elevation of vernaculars over Sanskrit, or even as far back as the 3rdcentury Sangamera.

Paul R. Brass approaches the concepts of region and regionalism primarily through the lens of political geography, loyalty, and integration. Brass acknowledges that regions are arbitrary and shift depending on the variables selected and the time period analysed. He provocatively suggests that regions like Bengal or Tamil Nadu might actually be “figments of the imaginations of certain classes...and those scholars who take them seriously.” However, he argues that these imaginations are important subjects of study because they determine the focus of people’s loyalties and shape the success of political integration. Rather than viewing regions solely as vast linguistic or cultural spaces, Brass conceptualises them through political behaviour. He points out that intra-state divisions (such as Awadh in Uttar Pradesh, Vidarbha in Maharashtra, or the hill-coast divide in Odisha) are often the most crucial arenas for localised regional consciousness and dictate the nature of party competition. He also identifies political regions that transcend state boundaries, such as the Chota Nagpur spanning parts of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha.

More recently,RajendraVora and Anne Feldhaus have argued that a region is fundamentally a “mental construct” and a “human product.” Regionalism, on the other hand, is defined as a “more systematic expression of regional consciousness.” It operates as an ideology rooted in the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identity of a specific area’s people. As regional consciousness evolves, elites often formulate specific arguments or justifications that manifest as political movements. These movements typically demand greater autonomy, a larger share of power, separate political existence within the nation, or even secession.

Vora and Feldhaus outline three distinct phases of regionalism in modern India.The first phase developed in the aftermath of Partition. The newly independent government viewed all regional expressions as potential threats to national unity. During this era, the Union government resisted regionalist demands based on religion

or ethnicity, though it did recognise and accommodate linguistic regions. The combination of Jawaharlal Nehru's charismatic leadership and the dominance of the Congress party system successfully maintained national unity, and regionalism did not escalate into separatism even when regional parties won power.

The second phase, spanning the regimes of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, was marked by the Union government attempting to impose unity from above and displace regional powers. In response, regionalist movements became extremist and challenged these centralising tendencies. This era of regionalism was fuelled by a sense of economic deprivation, as development planning failed to distribute resources equitably. Regional identities increasingly organised around ethnicity (as seen in the North East) or religion (as seen in Punjab, which became violent and separatist). The government handled this by granting statehood to some regions, sharing resources, refraining from competing with certain regional parties, or using police and military force to quell separatism.

In the third and current phase, the violent militancy of regionalism has largely subsided. Instead, regional parties have become highly influential in national politics, frequently being accommodated within coalition governments at the centre. The political scene has shifted such that state units of national parties often function like regional parties, while regional parties operate as extensions of national ones. Single-state parties, such as the Rashtriya Janata Dal or the Biju Janata Dal, emerged as key players that sometimes adopt a regionalist position.

13.4 SUB-NATIONALISM

AmalenduGuha has noted two broad paths in the development of Indian nationalism since its origin in the mid-nineteenth century: (i) great nationalism on an all-India plane and (ii) little nationalism on a linguistic-regional plane. For Guha, great nationalism was the ideology of a "nascent pan-Indian big bourgeoisie" who wanted a fair share of the growing national market, and an independent, unified state to protect their interests. On the other hand, little nationalism emerged as the ideology of the "regional small bourgeoisie" who feared competition from both the large national bourgeoisie and the middle classes of other regions. Guha's framework of "little nationalism" parallels the concept of sub-nationalism.

Sajal Nag defines sub-nationalism in India as a nationality formation process driven by regional identities, wherein diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups awaken and assert their status and aspirations. Rejecting the premise of a single, fully formed nation, Nag conceptualises India as a multinational entity containing multiple emerging nationalities at various stages of development. These movements based on regional identities are variously termed "little nationalism,""regionalism," or "sub-nationalism". These movements strive to secure self-rule, recognition of vernacular languages, the formation of unilingual provinces, and in some cases, complete independence. According to Nag, the historical evolution of sub-nationalism was set in motion by the same processes that triggered the pan-Indian nationalist movement: imperialism. Nag argues that as capitalism slowly penetrates new regions and awakens

new cultural groups, the emergence of sub-nationalist demands remains an unending historical process.

Sub-nationalism, according to Nag, primarily evolved as a reaction to resist domination, exploitation, and cultural absorption by the dominant nationalities or outsiders. Nag outlines that sub-nationalism manifested in five major ways: (1)the growth of respective vernacular literatures; (2) agitations to establish specific regional languages as the official languages of their areas; (3) movements by backward nationalities to break away from advanced nationalities to earn their own recognition; (4) movements by groups separated from their parent nationality due to administrative borders to rejoin their cultural mainstream; and (5) tribal struggles against outside encroachment to secure their own provinces and minimise exploitation.

A particularly contentious manifestation of sub-nationalism is what is sometimes called the “sons of the soil” politics. Borrowing from the larger discourse on indigeneity, certain communities claim that they are“original” or “native” inhabitants of a region. They demand special rights over land, resources, and jobs, that they claim should be protected from “outsiders.” The Shiv Sena in Maharashtra built its early politics on this platform. The different states of North East India have witnessed very strong campaigns and violent episodes against perceived “outsiders.” This assertion of identity is exclusionary as it defines self-identity against that of the “other.”

13.5 CASE STUDY: NORTH EAST INDIA

Sanjib Baruah conceptualises North East India not as a naturally evolving or vernacular identity, but as a postcolonial coinage and an officially organised region that took root in the 1970s. Rather than representing a shared cultural or historical geography, the directional name North East is an “artifact of deliberate policy” created by the postcolonial Indian state to turn a British imperial frontier space into a national space, driven largely by national security anxieties. For Baruah, the concept of the North East stands in for a “visual regime of racial profiling” and an “anomalous zone” defined by severe democracy deficits, militarised governance, and resource extraction.

In the post-independence period the North East witnessed a series of movements asserting regional identity and sometimes challenging the very idea of India.

Nagaland

The Naga question was one of the first major crises for the post-colonial Indian state under Nehru. As UdayonMisra observes, the Nagas were the first ethnic community in post-colonial India to pose a sustained challenge to this project. What makes the Naga case significant for our understanding of subnationalism is, as observed by SanjibBaruah, that the Nagas were also the first among the tribal communities of North East India to articulate themselves as a “nation,” thereby refusing the colonial administrative label of “tribe.” The formation of the Naga National Council (NNC) in January 1946 was a significant moment. NNC was formed by a group of educated Nagas. It built its ideological platform through its own publication, the Naga Nation.

Under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, the NNC declared the independence of the Nagas from British rule on August 14, 1947, a day before India's own independence. The NNC organised a plebiscite in 1951, asserting that it demonstrated nearly unanimous support for an independent state among the Nagas. In 1956, the NNC announced the formation of a Naga Federal Government and initiated a violent movement. In response, the Government of India deployed its army to restore order.

By 1957, moderate Naga leaders, led by ImkonglibaAo, began negotiations for a separate state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. The Indian government agreed and finally the state of Nagaland was established in 1963. However, the Naga Federal Government strongly opposed this, calling it a plan to turn Nagas against each other and vowing to continue their struggle.In 1975, a group of moderate Nagas signed the Shillong Accord with the Indian government, which accepted the existing political arrangement. As a result, Phizo and the Naga National Council (NNC) soon lost their leadership role in Naga politics. In 1980, a group of dissenters formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), denouncing the Shillong Accord as a betrayal of the Naga cause. The NSCN split in 1988, with the NSCN-IM emerging as the dominant faction.

According to UdayonMisra, the Naga struggle was not primarily determined by regional disparity or uneven development. Instead, its driving force was the concept of anindependent Naga homeland, where a "Naga way of life" could be preserved. Further, Misra argues that the Naga Hills saw historical and cultural factors playing a more dominant role. Historian John Thomas has examined the complex relationship between Christianity and the creation of Naga national identity. It is widely accepted that the concept of a Naga nation evolved alongside the conversion to Christianity. It is argued that a crucial factor in developing a "pan-Naga identity" was the missionary network, which brought hundreds of young Nagas from various communities together. Christian proselytisation is seen as a central theme in the campaign for Naga nationhood, with the motto "Nagas for Christ" believed to be a representation of this idea. However, Thomas argues that while proselytisation did have an impact on the local political movement, the missionaries often undermined the concerns and objectives of the Naga movement and gave legitimacy to the state's actions and narratives instead. He shows how missionaries and church leaders could be seen pacifying and destabilising the movement at different stages while silently colluding with the colonial and post-colonial states.

MIZORAM

The Mizo movement followed a somewhat different trajectory. Sociologist Roluahpuia has argued that the political history of Mizoram as a state is directly tied to its colonial history and its incorporation into the Indian Union. Colonial rule brought about several changes, including mapping the region, categorising its population, and creating territorial boundaries. This history, according to Roluahpuia, is crucial for understanding later political events and how the North East was reorganised along ethnic lines. This involved the internal remapping of the region, which included granting separate statehood to some areas and providing autonomous provisions to various communities.

In the years immediately after Independence, there was a feeling among the Mizo leadership that their culture was being lost due to the economic and cultural influence of the plains people of Assam. This led to the creation of the Mizo Cultural Society (MCS) with an objective to protect Mizo traditions and customs. The MCS worked to safeguard Mizo culture, and in 1959, it organised a rally in Aizawl to protest the Assam government's poor handling of an impending famine in the Mizo Hills. This rally led to the suspension or arrest of some of the movement's leaders who were government employees.

In 1959, the MCS became the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), shifting its focus entirely to relief and rehabilitation. By this point, Laldenga had assumed its leadership. In 1961, the MNFF transformed into the Mizo National Front (MNF). The demand for self- determination turned violent in 1966 when the MNF declared independence at midnight on February 28 and launched a military uprising. The Government of India responded immediately with counter-insurgency measures.

In 1973, following negotiations with moderate Mizo leaders, the Mizo Hills district was separated from Assam and granted the status of a Union Territory. While the Mizo insurgency briefly gained strength again in the late 1970s, the Government of India signed a peace agreement with Laldenga in June 1986, known as the Mizo Accord. Under the terms of the accord, MNF rebels surrendered their weapons and received amnesty from prosecution. In turn, the Indian government granted full statehood to Mizoram, and Laldenga became the Chief Minister.

Roluahpuia has problematised the narrative of peace and stability associated with Mizoram following the signing of the Mizo Accord. According to him, while peace has been remarkable, the oral testimonies from the former rebels challenge "the singular frame in which peace and peace-making are understood as an act of ending the conflict." Roluahpuia shows how the peace process was intricately linked to power struggles within the MNF. Thus, he asserts that peace in conflict zones is not just about stability, it is also driven by various interests, which often lead to an unequal distribution of benefits.

ASSAM

The case of Assam adds a further layer of complexity to our understanding of regional politics and subnationalism in North East India. The nature of ethnic conflict in Assam, andparticularly the character of the Assam Movement, has long divided academic opinion. While some scholars have emphasised the anxieties over land and demographic change,others have stressed the more exclusionary, chauvinistic dimensions of the movement. This disagreement played out prominently in a well-known debate among leading social scientists in the pages of the Economic and Political Weekly during the late 1970s and early1980s.

Sanjib Baruah's account of Assamese "micro-nationalism" traces its roots back to the mid-nineteenth century. This movement emerged initially as an assertion of the distinctiveness and autonomy of Assamese language and culture against the colonial administrative tendency to treat Assam as a mere periphery of Bengal. This concern with linguistic and cultural distinctiveness persisted well into the postcolonial period. But it acquired new urgency as there was fear of large-scale immigration, which would

reduce the native population to a minority in their own homeland. Compounding these anxieties was thestate's continuing underdevelopment and economic stagnation, which added to Assamese nationalist grievances.

These accumulated tensions erupted into sustained political unrest between 1979 and1985, centred on the contentious issue of suspected illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), this agitation known as the Assam Movement demanded the detection and deportation of "illegal immigrants." The demand was explicitly in terms of protecting Assamese demographic and political dominance in the state. The movement's "sons of the soil" character, in this sense, closely mirrors the exclusionary logic we identified earlier as a recurring feature of subnationalist politics inIndia, one that defines belonging sharply against the figure of the "outsider."The period was marked by considerable violence, reaching a peak during the especiallyturbulent election year of 1983, when AASU leaders called for an electoral boycott. The prolonged agitation was finally brought to a close with the signing of the Assam Accord in August 1985. In the elections that followed, the leadership of the Assam Movement translated its popular support into electoral success and formed government under a newly established political party. Yet this settlement did not mark the end of militancy in Assam. By the late 1980s, Assamese nationalism had taken a more radical and militant turn with the rise of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), whose demand for a fully separate homeland found considerable support among Assamese youth and led to a prolonged period of insurgency and state violence in the state.

Even as Assamese nationalism pressed its own demands, the Bodo ethnic community articulated a distinct subnationalist movement of their own. Led by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), this movement sought the creation of a separate state of Bodoland from the1980s onward. The Bodo demand generated violent confrontations with both Assamese radicals and non-Bodo minorities, alongside the emergence of an armed Bodo insurgency. This struggle eventually culminated in the Bodo Accord, which led to the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD)in 2003. This granted the Bodo community a significant form of political autonomy. Assam's postcolonial experience shows how subnationalism is rarely a singular event, of tengenerating competing and even overlapping claims.

Check your progress

Q 1. What do you understand by the term regionalism?

Q 2. What, according to Bernard Cohn, triggered the rise of regionalism in modern India?

Q 3. Define sub-nationalism.

Q 4. What do you understand by the term "sons of the soil" politics?

Q 5. What triggered the Mizo insurgency?

Q 6. Briefly discuss the early phase of the Naga conflict.

13.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this Unit, we have learnt that-

- Bernard Cohn categorises regions based on non-physical phenomena into historical, linguistic, cultural, and structural regions, emphasising that their boundaries are fluid and depend on the observer's perspective.
- While Cohn argues that Indian regionalism was triggered by modernisation and the 20thcentury nationalist movement, Burton Stein counters that it has deeper cultural roots, tracing it back to the 12thcentury Bhakti movement or the Sangam era.
- Sub-nationalism resists domination through five main avenues: promoting vernacular literatures, demanding official regional languages, backward nationalities breaking away, separated groups attempting to rejoin their cultural mainstream, and tribal struggles against encroachment.
- "Sons of the soil" politics is an exclusionary form of sub-nationalism, which involves communities claiming in digeneity to demand special rights over land, resources, and jobsat the expense of perceived "outsiders."
- Sanjib Baruah argues that North East India is not a naturally evolved identity but an "artifact of deliberate policy"created by postcolonial national security anxieties, resulting in an anomalous zone marked by militarised governance.
- One of India's first post-colonial crises was the Naga movement led by A.Z. Phizo.
- Despite the creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963 and the 1975 Shillong Accord, armed struggle continued under factions like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).

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13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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13.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. What is the significance of the Mizo Accord?

Q2. What do you understand by the term "little nationalism"?

Q3. How does Bernard Cohn characterise the different categories of regions?

Q4. Discuss any two assertions of sub-nationalism in the North East.

Q5. Explain the concept of sub-nationalism with reference to Sajal Nag's outline of the process.

Q6. Discuss the idea of regionalism by citing two specific examples.

Q7. Examine the origins and major developments of Assam Movement.

Q8. Discuss the emergence of Bodo subnationalism is the regional politics.

UNIT 14: NATIONALISM IN AFRICA

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Learning Objectives
14.2 Introduction
14.3 Rise of Nationalism in Africa
14.4 Tribalism and Ethnic Nationalism in Africa
14.5 Women in African Nationalism
14.6 Nelson Mandela
14.7 Let Us Sum Up
14.8 Further Readings
14.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
14.10 Model Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to-

- Explain the historical origins and evolution of African nationalism in the context of colonialism and the struggle for political independence.
- Explore the role of the modernizing elite, the impact of the Second World War, and the process of decolonization in the rise of African nationalism.
- Analyse the relationship between tribalism, ethnic nationalism, and the colonial legacy in shaping post-colonial African politics.
- Evaluate the contributions of African women and Nelson Mandela to nationalist movements and nation-building.
- Assess the challenges of post-colonial nation-building, including identity politics, reconciliation, democratic governance, and the creation of inclusive national identities.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

Nationalism in Africa emerged as a powerful response to colonial domination, racial discrimination, and the systematic erosion of African political and cultural identities. Initially expressed through efforts to recover African history and cultural dignity, nationalism gradually developed into organised political movements demanding self-government and independence. The emergence of an educated modernizing elite, the spread of ideas such as equality, justice and human rights, and the political transformations following the Second World War contributed significantly to the radicalisation and mass mobilisation of African nationalist movements.

However, the transition from colonial rule to independent nationhood was neither uniform nor uncomplicated. Colonial policies of classification and “divide and

rule" transformed relatively fluid social identities into rigid ethnic and tribal categories, creating enduring challenges for post-colonial nation-building. At the same time, African women played an important but often under-recognised role in liberation struggles, challenging both colonial domination and patriarchal structures. The leadership of Nelson Mandela represents an important shift towards progressive nationalism, reconciliation, constitutional democracy and inclusive citizenship.

14.3 RISE OF NATIONALISM IN AFRICA

Nationalism in Africa emerged as a transformative process that evolved from initial cultural resistance into a formidable political force. This movement followed a clear progression, commencing with the recovery of identity, advancing to organized political movements, and ultimately culminating in full-scale liberation struggles.

The initial phase of nationalism was a response to the "deformed" sense of self brought about by colonial rule. For decades, colonial systems created "native subjectivities" that positioned Africans in a state of structured subordination. In reaction, early nationalist thinkers and intellectuals embarked on a journey of "reclaiming the past." They conducted research into previously unexplored facets of African history, illuminating ancient achievements and the "foundations of black civilization." This phase was crucial, as it provided the cultural legitimacy and intellectual development necessary to challenge the colonial narrative of "savagery" and assert the right to self-determination.

The Formation of a Modernizing Elite

As educational opportunities expanded, a new class of African "modernizing elites" emerged. These individuals, often educated in colonial or Western institutions, began to employ the colonizers' own language in concepts such as justice, reason, and human rightsto highlight the contradictions inherent in the colonial state. These elites became the foremost advocates of nationalism, framing the movement not merely as a return to tradition, but as a shift toward "political modernism." They envisioned a future in which Africans would no longer be passive "subjects" of a racialized state, but rather active "citizens" capable of shaping their own destinies through reason and governance.

Radicalization and Mass Mobilization

The movement transitioned from an intellectual discourse to a widespread struggle when colonial authorities intensified repression in response to calls for change. In the aftermath of the Second World War, rapid urbanization and stringent laws further radicalized the political landscape. In countries like South Africa, the suppression of dissenting voices following major protests compelled prominent leaderssuch as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambointo lives of resistance, imprisonment, or exile. This period of significant sacrifice transformed nationalism into a robust, continent-wide force. The struggle evolved into a "long walk" toward freedom, uniting diverse ethnic and linguistic groups under the common goal of eradicating foreign exploitation.

The Transition to Independent Nationhood

The final step involved transitioning from liberation movements to the establishment of sovereign states. This phase was marked by a drive towards "progressive nationalism," aimed at creating inclusive societies built on reconciliation rather than racial or ethnic exclusion. Leaders such as Mandela embodied this shift, guiding their nations away from potential conflict and toward the principles of constitutional democracy. However, this achievement introduced new challenges: post-colonial leaders faced the need to navigate the "toxic identity politics" that were a legacy of colonial "divide and rule" strategies. Thus, the rise of nationalism culminated in the ongoing task of forging a sustainable national identity that transcends the divisions of the colonial era and empowers all citizens within their newly formed political frameworks.

14.4 TRIBALISM AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN AFRICA

The notion of "tribe" and ethnic nationalism in Africa is deeply rooted in the primordial social factors of ethnicity, land, religion, and culture, which together create a foundational worldview shaped by African ancestors. At the core of this worldview is the concept of kinship, inherently grounded in blood ties and a profound sense of belonging. However, while these cultural foundations are ancient, the rigid form of "tribalism" observed in more recent history is often regarded as a colonial construct. Prior to the colonial era, African societies were marked by pluralism and flexibility, with identities that were often multiple and fluid. In response to the "native question" of stabilizing alien rule, the colonial administrative state systematically sought to "invent" tradition. This was achieved by converting fluid customs into rigid "customary laws" and distinct "tribal" categories, thereby creating essentialist identities that marginalized indigenous systems and catered to the requirements of imperial administration. This phenomenon was part of a broader "invention of Africa," wherein Western knowledge systems defined African realities through the lens of European power and classification.

The colonial legacy has led to a significant political impasse in contemporary Africa, marked by a tension between modernist and communitarian perspectives. Modernists, often drawing from liberal traditions, contend that Africa's challenges stem from an "embryonic" civil society. They advocate for a rights-based regime in which Africans are recognized as "citizens" within a national framework. In contrast, communitarians criticize this view as Eurocentric, arguing that the genuine "flesh-and-blood" communities of Africa have been reduced to mere "tribes" and should occupy a central role in public life. This dilemma of "citizen vs. subject" is a direct legacy of the colonial state, which organized power by treating Africans as subjects of specific ethnic authorities under customary law, rather than as individuals endowed with universal rights. This dual power structure continues to shape modern governance and often fragments resistance against the state by tethering political mobilization to ethnic identities.

Contrary to the notion that modernization and education would reduce the importance of ethnicity, ethnic identity remains a powerful influence, particularly among those most integrated into modern society. "Modern" individualscharacterized by their education, urban residence, and non-traditional occupationsare often more likely to identify with their ethnic group than their rural counterparts. This phenomenon is largely

attributed to the strong link between ethnic identity and political competition, especially as national elections approach.

Moreover, the "invention of tradition" during the colonial period transcended political boundaries, infiltrating the domestic and gendered aspects of African life. Colonial initiatives such as the foyer social in Belgian Africa were deliberately designed to "domesticate" African women by instilling European-style domesticity and notions of "respectability." These centers employed repetitive ritualslike holiday teas and social gatheringsto institutionalize "new traditions of subordination," which underscored marital unity and subordinate gender roles. Similarly, in other colonial contexts, the wives of British administrators assumed roles akin to "lesser queens," upholding elaborate domestic rituals that modelled a hierarchy of authority and subordination. These practices extended beyond mere social customs to serve as instruments of colonial control, leveraging "maternalism" to complement the "paternalism" inherent in the male-led administration. As a result, ethnic nationalism in contemporary Africa emerges as a dynamic phenomenon, continually reproduced through the interplay of state structures, resource competition, and these historically constructed social identities.

14.5 WOMEN IN AFRICAN NATIONALISM

The involvement of women in African liberation movements was a complex process in which they emerged as strategic agents of resistance against the dominant forces of colonial rule. Women utilised a diverse array of strategies to resist, endure, and navigate colonial conditions. They acted as "midwives to independence," participating in both individual acts of defiance and organised collective efforts to confront colonial authorities seeking to control their bodies, labour, sexuality, and autonomy. This resistance was not merely a reaction to foreign domination; rather, it represented a proactive initiative to adapt to the shifting socio-political landscape imposed by alien powers. Women's agency was crucial to the success of these movements, as they harnessed their social positions to carve out space within the emerging modern political frameworks of their respective nations.

Patriarchal Revolutions and the Auxiliary Role

Despite their significant contributions, many national liberation movements operated as "patriarchal revolutions." These movements often relegated women to subordinate roles, serving as auxiliaries to men in both the political arena and the domestic sphere. Nationalist discourse frequently employed gendered imagery, such as "Mother Politics," to engage women, while simultaneously reinforcing traditional hierarchies. The colonial state had already established a framework for this subordination through the "invention of tradition" and institutions like the foyer social, which promoted European-style notions of domesticity and "respectability." These colonial structures, often bolstered by Christian morality and colonial lawwhich sometimes required a husband's approval for a wife to work and fostered an environment in which male évolués (a African who had been Europeanised through education and assimilation and ad accepted European values and patterns of behaviour) could consolidate power at the expense of women's full political participation.

Institutional Evolution and Pan-Africanism

The transition from liberation struggles to post-colonial state-building witnessed the emergence of formal organizations, such as the Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO). PAWO played a crucial role in shaping African cultural values and practices during the formation of new nations. These organizations facilitated the shift of women from active combatants or protestors to roles focused on governmental development and social policy. However, this evolution was fraught with significant socio-economic and political challenges. Groups like PAWO had to navigate their autonomy within the broader Pan-African movement, often contending with the same patriarchal constraints that had characterized the earlier liberation era. The transformation of PAWO reflects the broader trajectory of African women's movements as they endeavoured to reconcile national loyalty with the specific needs and rights of women.

Negotiating Autonomy and the "Woman Question"

The history of women in modern African political movements is marked by a persistent tension between their significant contributions to the nation and their struggle for gender-specific rights. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, in her work "African Women: A Modern History," emphasizes that women's resistance encompassed a dual struggle against both colonial oppression and internal structures that restricted their mobility and reproductive rights. As women navigated their roles within nationalist movements, they often brought attention to the "woman question," which led to the emergence of autonomous movements aimed at addressing issues beyond the immediate quest for independence. By challenging the "traditions of subordination" imposed by both colonial and indigenous patriarchal systems, women ensured that the narrative of African modern political boundaries was not solely the history of men, but rather a transformative era of social change driven by the active participation of women.

14.6 NELSON MANDELA

The rise of nationalism throughout Africa emerged as a poignant struggle for human freedom and dignity, confronting the entrenched forces of colonial rule. This period was marked by a transition to "political modernism," characterized by the belief that individuals have the power to shape their own destinies through the principles of reason and justice. Within this broader continental movement, Nelson Mandela emerged as a pivotal figure, a "titan" and "colossus" of liberation. Mandela's leadership was rooted in the idea of "self-determining freedom," empowering the oppressed to reject systems of racial supremacy and envision a transformed society founded on logic and social justice. His interpretation of nationalism was fundamentally progressive, resonating across the globe as a universal challenge for equality.

Radicalization under the Apartheid Machinery

Nelson Mandela's significant contribution to African history emerged within the oppressive context of the South African apartheid regime. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the minority white government reacted to rapid urbanization with increasingly draconian laws, which subsequently spurred a considerable radicalization of black political movements. The suppression of political voices following the Sharpeville massacre led many of the nation's most promising leadersincluding

visionary figures like Mandelainto imprisonment or exile. Mandela's twenty-seven-year incarceration became a powerful symbol of resilience against systemic exploitation. His capacity to uphold moral courage during this challenging period ultimately enabled him to guide the country away from the brink of a potential racial conflict and towards the remarkable "South African miracle" of reconciliation.

Progressive Nationalism vs. Dictatorial Tendencies

A significant aspect of Mandela's contribution to African nationalism was his dedication to a visionary and humble approach to governance, which stood in stark contrast to the self-serving and authoritarian tendencies seen in some other post-colonial contexts. Mandela's passing ignited an extraordinary wave of grief throughout Africa, prompting nations such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Tanzania to declare official periods of national mourning. This widespread recognition stemmed from Mandela's embodiment of "progressive nationalism," which fundamentally represented a quest for social justice rather than a mere pursuit of personal or ethnic gain. By championing a vision of the state founded on forgiveness and the elimination of racial barriers, he provided a blueprint for forging a national identity centered on inclusive citizenship.

The Mandela Legacy and the Challenge of Identity

While the liberation movement succeeded in establishing a constitutional democracy, Mandela's legacy underscores the "unfinished business" of identity politics. The "Mandela moment" marked the closest the nation has come to a post-racial era; however, it also revealed that a modern state necessitates "cultural instruments" to effectively navigate the complexities of race and belonging. Mandela's legacy implies that genuine national unity requires "working through race" rather than ignoring its reality. By focusing on reconciliation, Mandela laid the groundwork for a national initiative that enabled the "oppressed section of society" to evolve from being subjects of a racialized state to active participants in a free and democratic society.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: What were the main factors responsible for the rise of nationalism in Africa?

Q2: Who were the modernizing elites, and what role did they play in African nationalism?

Q3: How did colonialism contribute to tribalism and ethnic nationalism in Africa?

Q4: What is meant by "progressive nationalism" in post-colonial Africa?

Q5: What was the significance of the Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO)?

14.7 LET US SUM UP

- African nationalism evolved from a movement to reclaim African identity and history into a powerful struggle for political independence and sovereignty.
- It emerged as a response to colonial rule, which distorted African history, undermined African identity, and reduced Africans to subordinate "native subjects."

- Early nationalist thinkers and the modernizing elite challenged colonial domination by using ideas of reason, justice, equality, and political rights learned through Western education.
- The movement was driven by the goal of political modernism, seeking to replace colonial rule with self-governance and democratic citizenship.
- After the Second World War, rapid social and political changes increased popular awareness, leading to the radicalization of nationalist movements across Africa.
- Leaders such as Nelson Mandela transformed nationalism into a broad-based liberation struggle against colonialism, apartheid, and racial oppression.

14.8 FURTHER READINGS

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14.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: African nationalism arose as a response to colonial exploitation and racial discrimination. It was strengthened by the recovery of African history and identity, the emergence of educated modernizing elites, the spread of political consciousness after the Second World War, and mass mobilization against colonial rule.

Ans to Q2: The modernizing elites were educated Africans who received Western or colonial education. They used ideas such as justice, equality, and human rights to expose the contradictions of colonial rule and became the principal leaders of nationalist movements advocating self-government and political modernization.

Ans to Q3: Colonial administrations transformed flexible ethnic identities into rigid tribal categories through customary laws and the policy of divide and rule. This strengthened ethnic divisions, making tribal identities a major factor in post-colonial politics and nation-building.

Ans to Q4: Progressive nationalism refers to the effort to build inclusive and democratic nation-states after independence. It emphasizes reconciliation, equality, constitutional governance, and national unity instead of racial or ethnic domination.

Ans to Q5: The Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO) promoted women's participation in nation-building after independence. It worked to shape social policy, preserve African cultural values, and advocate for women's rights while contributing to the broader Pan-African movement.

14.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. What inspired the rise of nationalism in Africa?
2. How did colonialism impact African identity?
3. What challenges did post-colonial leaders face in nation-building?
4. What factors contributed to the rise of modernizing elites in African nationalism?
5. How did WWII influence nationalist movements in Africa?
6. What is "progressive nationalism" in the context of post-colonial Africa?
7. How did colonialism shape ethnic identities in African nations?
8. What role did early nationalist thinkers play in shaping the movement for self-governance in Africa?
9. How did the repression by colonial powers after World War II contribute to the radicalization of nationalist movements in Africa?
10. In what ways did post-colonial leaders strive for inclusive governance while addressing the challenges of identity politics?
11. How did the colonial construct of tribalism affect ethnic identities in Africa and influence post-colonial nation-building?

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