UNIT 18   PROBLEMS OF NATIONAL UNITY : A COLONIAL HERITAGE

Structure

18.0   OBJECTIVES

This unit shall analyse the problems relating to National Unity in India. Here, the issues of Communalism and Regionalism are identified as the two major obstacles to national unity. After studying this unit, you will be able to :

- Discuss with some authority the concepts of Communalism and Regionalism.
- Trace the historical background of the evolution of these two ideas and processes.
- Learn the mechanisms by which the British colonial rule manipulated Indian people, and also know about their role in aggravating communal tensions in India.

18.1   INTRODUCTION

India is a multi-ethnic society. There are a large number of ethnic groups which vary in size from highly localized cast and tribal groups, to very large language and religious groups. No single

group is clearly dominant, and the boundaries between the various groups are not entirely fixed. In such a situation, the difficulties involved in presenting the theme of principles of Indian unity are of a fundamental nature. Of late, there has been a tendency in the literature on political development to focus upon national integration as a policy which seeks assimilation of the entire population of a state to a common identity and which recognizes only individual rights, privileges and duties.

Such a policy is to be distinguished from one of political integration, which seeks to maintain the cohesion and territorial integrity of a political unit, but does not necessarily demand the cultural assimilation of diverse groups to either a dominant or composite culture. Without going into the validity of these two processes, one can question the extent to which either individually or together, have contributed to the process of nation building. In fact, today, one finds that on issues like language, religion, caste, tribe and region the divisive forces due to their vested interests are threatening to break the very fabric of Indian unity. In this unit, we look into the historical background of the problems of communalism and regionalism in relation to national unity. This is because today these are possibly the greatest impediments in the task of national integration.

18.2 EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF NATIONAL UNITY

There has been a considerable debate among scholars on the question whether the term India applies to an all encompassing civilization with clearly identifiable components that make for a political and cultural reality, or it refers merely to an application of the term multiplicity of distinctive political and cultural regions, within a defined geographical location. By the 1880's this debate had emerged clearly. John Strachey in his book '*India'*, mentioned that the most essential thing to learn about India was that :

"There is not and never was an India, or even a country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, my sort of unity : physical, political, social or religious".

As against this British emphasis on regionalism, a large number of Indian writers like D.R. Bhandarkar, Bankim Chandra Chattergie, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and a number of other nationalist writers tried to assert that there was and always had been and India, attested to by its physical, political, social and cultural unity. An attempt was made to synthesize the conflicting position by Vincent Smith in his `Oxford History of India', when he mentioned, "India offers unity in diversity", a usage which was used by Jawaharlal Nehru to demonstrate the secular content of this unity.

18.3 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL UNITY

There is no denying the fact that in the modern sense of the term India as a nation had never existed before the establishment of British colonial rule, but India had a long history of religious toleration and cultural assimilation. This gave India's long history a sense of continuity. British rule provided the basic infra-structure for the growth of India into a nation. This is brought out by the following :

The British brought the entire geographical area of the country under a single administration.

They also unified the country by introducing a uniform system of law and government.

The introduction of modern means of communication like railways, telegraphs, a postal system, development of roads and motor transport produced the same unifying effect.

The destruction of rural and local economic self-sufficiency, and the growth of internal trade created conditions for the growth of a national consciousness, which could have become the basis for a unified Indian state. But if British rule unconsciously contributed to the growth of Indian unity, their deliberate policy of divide and rule certainly undid what had been achieved unintentionally.

Check Your Progress 1

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

1)   Which of the following statements are right or wrong ? Mark (√) and (x)

       i)   John Strachey described India as a nation which was there for a long time.
       ii)   India has a long history of cultural assimilation.
       iii)   In India there is a unity in diversity.
2)   What were the views of a nationalists in relation to India being a nation?

       ....
       ....
       ....
       ....
       ....…………………………………………………..........

18.4 BRITISH ROLE AND ITS IMPACT

From 1757 the British used their control over India to promote their own interests. But the character of their rule did not remain the same throughout. The nature of colonial rule, policies, and their impact changed with the changing pattern of Britain's own social, economic and political development. Thus :

i)   In the first stage of the British rule, no basic changes were introduced in the administration, the judicial system, transport and communication, the methods of agriculture or industrial production or in the educational and intellectual fields.

ii)   The second stage saw the transformation of Indian economy to cater to the interests of the British industrial capitalists. The new economic role which its was now required to perform could not be done in the old setting.

Therefore, the British Government after 1813, set out to transform Indian administration, economy and society to achieve exactly these ends. A new judicial system based on a new corpus of laws and legal codes - Indian Penal Code, and the Civil Procedure Code - was introduced. There was also the need for manpower resources to run the new system : therefore, modern education that had been introduced after 1813, was expanded after 1833. This period also saw the emergence of a liberal imperialist political ideology among British statesmen and British Indian administrators and hence, the talk of training Indians in the art of self-government.

iii)   The third stage of British rule in India coincided with far-reaching changes in the world economic situation. It was the emergence of America, France, Germany, Russia and Japan as industrial powers, resulting in a worldwide competition for markets and colonies. Thus, in this stage British rule was marked by a renewed upsurge of imperialist control. All talk of educating Indians for self-government was given up.
On the contrary, it came to be emphasised that because of geographical, historical,social and cultural factors, the Indian people had become permanently unfit for self-government: therefore, the need for the British to continue with their rule. To perpetuate their rule had recourse to various measures :

a)   They tried to put checks on the process of modernization in India, when they saw that such changes produced social forces that began to oppose imperialism and the exploitative machinery of the colonial rule.

b)   Secondly, in the face of growing threat from the Indian National Movement, every conceivable effort was made to keep the people divided so that a strong unified movement could never be created.

As a consequence of the above, by the end of the 19th century, India had been completely transformed as a colony of Great Britain. The development of England as a leading capitalist country went hand in hand with the growing underdevelopment of India into a backward economy. All the policies of the British Government were designed to convert India into a colonial economy to serve the interests of the British Government, British manufacturers, British investments and a large imperialist administration. Of all the important administrative measures of the British Government in India, the one which had the greatest impact on the people, was their policy on land revenue administration.

18.4.1 Peasants

The two major land revenue and tenurial systems which Britain introduced were the Zamindari System (later also known as Mahalwari System though in a modified form) and the Ryotwari System.

This transformation was brought about not with an idea of improving the agricultural economy of India and improving the economic condition of the people by increased productivity. Instead, the main objective was to create a class of landed elements who looked up to the British for their power and position and to ensure that all agricultural surplus was utilized in British financial interest.

Under both these systems, the ultimate sufferers were the peasants. In the Zamindari system, the old tax frame were turned into private landlords, complete masters of the village communities,

and the peasants were reduced a tenants at will. These new landlords, however, had to pay a bulk of their rent collected from their tenants to the government.

In the Ryotwari System, the government collected revenue directly from the individual cultivators. Though the right of ownership was recognised, the high rate of revenue made their right only tentative. Through these two institutions, the government assumed the position of a landlord.

One of the resultant evil effects of this policy was the growth of a class of money-lenders, who not only became an influential economic strata in the country, but also a political force, often manipulating the new judicial and the administrative systems to their advantage. The inroads made in the villages by the landlords, money-lenders and merchants ruined the agrarian economy. These measures resulted in the emergence of new social classes in the rural areas - landlords, intermediaries, money-lenders at the top and tenants-at-will, share-croppers and agricultural labourers at the bottom. Not only was exploitation intensified, but it led to a greater fragmentation of society, all to the benefit of British, of course.

18.4.2 Tribals

British rule and the policy of commercialization of agriculture strengthened tendencies towards penetration of tribal areas by outsiders from the plains - money-lenders, traders, land grabbers and contractors. The tribal people greatly resented the intrusion of colonial administration. Most of all, they objected to the penetration of their simple and sheltered life by various classes of exploiters. A new but increasingly important factor from the 1870's was the tightening of control by the colonial state over forest zones for revenue purposes. Shifting cultivation which required no plough animals and therefore, was often essential for the survival of the poorest in rural society, was banned or restricted in the reserved forests from 1867 onwards. Attempts were made to monopolize forest wealth through laws curbing the use of timber and grazing facilities. Protest by tribal groups was marked by immense courage and sacrifice on their part and of course, savage butchery the part of the official machinery of suppression. One can mention in particular the revolts of the Kols from 1820 to 1837, the Santhals in 1855-56, the Rampas in 1879 and the Mundas from 1895-1901.

These fragmentations which created wide disparities and imbalances were manifold in nature-regional, communal, tribal, non-tribal, high caste and low caste, educated, non-educated, etc. Such fragmentation and imbalances created problems for a united national movement. In order to mobilize all the people in the struggle against imperialism, the national movement became committed to the goals of abolishing all distinctions and disparities based on caste, sex or religion.

18.4.3 Education and Reform

The link with the West also led to the entry of modern ideas into India and the intellectual life of Indians began to undergo revolutionary changes. However, if ideas of democracy, sovereignty of the people, rationalism and humanism developed in India, that was not the desired goals of the colonialists. Modern education introduced in India after 1813 was very limited. Primary and social education was neglected and later the British turned hostile to higher education, because the indirect carrier of nationalism. The structure and pattern, aims, method, curricula and content of the education system were all designed to serve colonialism.

Some of the aspects of Indian education, arising out of its colonial character, can be summarized as follows :

> There was a complete neglect of modern technical education, a basic necessity for the development of modern industry.

> There was the emphasis on English language as the medium of instruction in place of Indian languages. As a result, education could not spread to the masses creating a wide, social, linguistic and cultural gulf between the educated elites and the masses. Education became a virtual monopoly of the middle and upper classes in towns and cities.

In the initial stages, the colonial government encouraged social reforms, but gradually, the conservative character and long term interests of colonialism led to a change of attitude. The British not only withdrew their support of the reformers, but buttressed the orthodox, reactionary and decadent elements of the Indian society, who willingly served as the bulwark of the British Raj.

18.4.4 Martial Race Concepts

British policy of classifying Indians into martial and non-martial races, and basing their policy of army recruitments and division of regiments on regional lines, also went against the principles of national unity. For example, the Bengalis were especially singled out for their lack of manly courage. T.B. Mckinley in an essay on Warren Hastings in his 'Critical and Historical Essays', wrote :

> "The physical organization of the Bengali is feeble, even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limb delicate, his movements languid. During many ages he was been trampled upon by men of bolder and more hardy breeds. Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavorable".

Needless to say, such a characterization was malicious and unwarranted but it certainly served British ends.

Based on such prejudices were formed the Sikh, Jat, Rajput and Maratha Regiments. Thus, the army instead of being a national force, emerged instead as a mere assemblage of units representing regional, sectarian or caste interests. Unfortunately, this process has continued even after independence. It is only very recently that a reassessment is being done to do away with these legacies of the colonial rule.

In this way, from the end of the 19th century onward, the British policy of ‚Divide and Rule' became the basic and all pervading element of colonial policy. This policy manifested itself not only through a communal division of Indians into monolithic religious groups, but also attempted to set as many groups and interests against one another as possible. Thus, the British encouraged provincialism, regionalism such as Bengali versus Bihari, or Punjabi versus Bengali, linguism, caste against caste, martial versus non-martial races, etc. All the instruments in the hand of the colonial power were utilised towards their basic objective of keeping the people divided.

Check Your Progress 2

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

1)   Write in about ten lines the impact of colonial policies on the tribals.

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....……………………………..

2)   Which of the following statement are right or wrong? Mark (√) or (x).

       i)   As a result of colonial education policy there emerged a gulf between the elite and the masses.
       ii)   Classifying Indians into martial and non-martial races was a result of British policy of divide and rule.
       iii)   The British divided Indians into martial and non-martial races to strengthen Indian Unity.
       iv)   The British encouraged provincialism.

2)   Why did the British withdraw their support to social reforms?

....
....
....
....
....……………………………………………………......

18.5 DISTORTIONS IN HISTORY

All possible attempts were made to distort Indian history. First, the British tried to show that Indian had always been ruled by tyrants and despots, implying thereby that :

First, as long as the British provided the Indians with the rule of law, the British too could afford to be autocratic.

Secondly, they tried to show that British rule had actually liberated the Hindus from the maltreatment they had suffered at the hands of the Muslims.

Thirdly, they repeatedly asserted that the Hindus and the Muslims had always been divided into two mutually exclusive monolithic groups.

The periodization of Indian history into the Hindu period, Muslim period and British period was deliberately done to underline this presumed division and separateness.

Such a distorted, unscientific view of Indian history, especially of its ancient and medieval periods, was a major factors in the spread of communal ideology among the people. The teaching of Indian history in schools and colleges contributed in a major way to the growth of communal feeling. Communal interpretation of Indian history was done first by writers and then by others. Thus, H.M. Elliot, referring to Muslim rule in India, wrote :

> "The few glimpses we have ... of Hindus slain for disputing with Muhammedans, of general prohibitions against processions, worship and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures, of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, of proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them".

Elliot accepted that his motive in writing history was to make "Our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule", and to make the emerging nationalist intellectuals see the reality of pre-British India and stop their critique of British imperialism.

Unfortunately, many Indian writers imbibed consciously or unconsciously these prejudices of the imperialist historians, and ignoring all historical evidence, went on to project their present into the past and came to view Muslim rule in a similar spirit, or glorified the attempts at empire building by the Hindus. Thus, Sir Jadunath Sarkar (in his History of Aurangzab', Vol. III), wrote :

> "The conversion of the entire population to Islam and the extinction of every form of dissent is the ideal of the Muslim state. If any infidel is suffered to exist in the community, it is as a necessary evil, and for transitional period only. Political and social disabilities must be imposed on him, and bribes offered to him from the public funds, to hasten the day of his spiritual enlightenment and the addition of his name to the roll of true believers."

Similarly, A. L. Srivastava in his 'History of India' (1000-1707 A.D.) wrote :

> "The Turkish process of conquest and subjugation of the country, being co-extensive with the period of its rule, lasted for over 350 years, during which lakhs of Hindus were killed, and lakhs were massacred after wars, and lakhs of their women and children were converted and sold as slaves ... politically and socially, the Hindus, as a people had to suffer deeply during this period. Not only were they deprived of their position as rulers, ministers, governors, and commanders of troops, but were also treated contemptuously."

The role of history teaching and such distortions in the spread on communalism was seen clearly by contemporary observers also. Gandhiji wrote that communal harmony could not be permanently established in our country so long as highly distorted versions of history were being taught in schools and colleges through the history textbooks.

In 1932, the "Foreword" to the Report of the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee appointed by the Indian National Congress pointed out :

"We feel that unless the people begin to see the past in a truer perspective, it will be very difficult or well-nigh impossible, to restore mutual confidence and to arrive at a real and permanent solution of the present differences. We consider, therefore, that an attempt to remove historical misconceptions is the first and the most indispensable step in the real solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem."

Even more than the textbooks, the communal view of history was spread widely through poetry, dramas, historical novels and short stories, newspapers and popular magazines, pamphlets, and orally through public platforms and private discussions.

Thus, there is a persistent attempt by many scholars and political leaders to show that the communal politics of the present had its roots in the past ; in fact, in the very nature of Muslim rule. It should be clearly understood that communalism was not a remnant of the past or a hangover of the medieval period. In the words of Prof. Bipan Chandra :

"It was modern ideology that incorporated some aspects and element of the past ideologies and institutions and historical background to form a new ideological and political discourse or view".

18.6 ORIGINS OF COMMUNAL TENSIONS AND POLITICS

It was the post 1857 period which saw the development of such politics and ideology which resulted in widening the gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims. The latent differences in their perceptions were allowed to surface and the existing goodwill and amity were marred by the growth of communal politics and ideology. The major communal riots occurred in the first half of the 20th century (1906-07, 1918,1926,1930 and 1946).

There is a conceptual distinction between communal tension and communal politics. Communal tension, as Prof. Bipan Chandra points out, is episodic and usually involves the lower classes only. But communal politics is a long-term process which is rather continuous unlike the former. It mainly involves the middle classes, landlords and bureaucratic elements. Though, both the integrated terms, what bring about communal riots are communal ideology and politics. Communalism as a divisive force, in the societal and political life, is the result of the last hundred years of communal politics and ideology.

The view was fuelled by the Britishers' belief in the notion of division on the basis of religious communities. Though, it would be historically incorrect to say that tension and differences had never existed under the 'Muslim' rule, these were not communal nature, but reflected more the differences of class : the ruling class and the ruled, the producers and the consumers, the landlords and the tenants, and each of these groups was composed of both Hindus and Muslims. In social and cultural spheres, both the Hindus and Muslims had lived side by side sharing pastoral and other festivals. The existence of syncretistic cults such as those of Satyapir, Manikpir, etc. show the veneration by Hindus and Muslims alike of holy men. In the field of poetry there were a number of Muslim poets who wrote on Vaishnav themes : for example, Sayed Martuja, Chand Kazi, Sahanur and Lal Mahmud. Hindu Gods were held in high esteem. Nawab Mir Jafar, at the time of his death, offered to drink the water of liberation poured on the idol of Goddess Kiriteshwari and a few drops were actually poured down his throat by Maharaja Nand Kumar. But, religion replaced other loyalties. viz., to the nation and the emphasis on the former

continued throughout the British rule. This was reflected in different fields of activity, as we shall presently see.

18.6.1 In Representation to Legislatures

The system of communal representation was an important feature in official policy. Here creation of communal electorates by the Act of 1909 was significant. By this Act, Muslims could vote in Muslim constituencies for anyone, irrespective of their religion, though they could also vote along with the Hindus for general seats. After the Act of 1919, the situation worsened, with both the Muslims and the Hindus being permitted to vote members of their own community. The Simon Commission report presented in 1930, only reinforced such a view, with its emphasis on strengthening of communal representation in legislative bodies and communal reservation. Weightage and discrimination were other facets of the British policy.

There were two basic assumptions proving encouragement for such a system :

i)   The British believed that the political, social economic and cultural interests of different communities were separate, and their respective interest could be best represented only by members of their own communities.

ii)   A general electorate would open up the possibility of domination by the majority community, both in terms of representation in the legislature as well as by articulating their interests. Separate electorates turned elections and the legislatures into arenas of communal conflicts.

Added to the system of separate electorates was the other restrictive system of property and educational qualifications. Thus, the elections were mostly confined to the middle classes and separate electorates meant institutionalisation of middle class needs and politics along communal lines. For instance, the communal award declared in early 1932 by Ramsay Macdonald provided for separate Hindu, Untouchable, and Muslim electorates for the new federal legislatures. This separate treatment and differentiation between the Hindus and Untouchables provoked resentment by Gandhiji who opposed the award. He demanded reservation of more seats for them (he referred to them as Harijans) in the legislature within the Hindu electorate. This was amendment to the Communal Award.

18.6.2 In Jobs

In the late 19th century, the differences between the two communities manifested themselves in three directions. First, it took the form of conflict over jobs. A study conducted by Sufia Ahmad shows that in the province of Bengal in September 1907, the number of Muslims employed in the salary range of Rs. 15-1001 and upwards was only 1,235 as compared to the Hindu enjoyed a numerical superiority in all services and grades. During the British rule, the divide and rule policy was increased in the matter of jobs.

18.6.3 In Agrarian Relations

Disputes between landlords and tenants was another area where the communal tensions were visible. This occurred particularly in East Bengal (now Bangladesh), where the majority of the zamindars were Hindus and the tenants Muslims. The 1901 census showed that of every 10,000

Muslims, 7,316 were cultivators. But, out of every 10,000 Hindus, there were only 5,555 cultivators. Thus, the proportion of landlords was 170 in 10,000 in the case of Muslims, and 217 in the case of Hindus. And this relationship between the landlords and the tenants was allowed by the British to worsen for obvious reasons.

18.6.4 In Society and Culture

The ideological factor reflected in English-education and the resultant cultural influences aggravated communalism. English education portrayed the British as saviours of Hindus from Muslim tyranny. The already growing gulf between the Hindus and the Muslims, was intensified further by the British through their various administrative and other institutions.

Besides the encouragement of communal tensions, the caste divisions in the society were also highlighted. Caste solidarity was encouraged too. In pre-British India, the availability of land and the fluid political situation, had facilitated caste mobility through each migration. The colonial rule closed or reduced some of these avenues. At the same time, the Governor of U.P. supported Hindu Communalism in that province. He increased the number of Hindus in government employment and supported the advocates of Hindi and not Urdu, thus sowing deeper divisions between the two communities.

From the first decade of the twentieth century, the principle of reserving posts and promotions in public services through fixed quotas for Hindus and Muslims was rigorously pursued in Bengal and Punjab. The principle was extended to all provincial and all India Services in 1934. It was also increasingly applied to admissions to professional and other government colleges.

The Government also carefully managed educational development through municipal committees and district boards, colleges, universities and denominational schools, which only promoted rivalry between communities in the field of education.

Apart from jobs and education, communal rivalry was also created through contracts and conferment of titles, appointment of honorary magistrates and nomination to municipal and legislative bodies.

The British failed to take action against the propagators of communal tensions and ideas. Whereas the government had evolved an extensive system of police-reporting, intelligence gathering press censorship and other laws to control the legitimate demands of the people (which was effectively used against the nationalists), the very same machinery took no action against the instigators of tensions. They were helped by the attitude of the communal and British-owned newspapers, which highlighted these tensions and inflamed passions, thus, contributing to bitter feelings. English education increasingly provided a new ladder to social promotion for a small but growing minority; in the process, creating wider differentiations. From 1901 onwards, the British also made a direct contribution by undertaking a caste census, which classified castes on the basis of social precedence as recognised by native public opinion. This encouraged the Jati leaders to organise caste associations and invent mythological caste histories to puts their claims for pre-eminence. Successful leading members of a jati mobilized support from their caste brethren in their usually parochial and selfish struggle for social recognition, jobs and political favours. This

process was greatly accelerated by the gradual introduction of electoral politics from the 1880's onward.

Check Your Progress 3

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

1)   Discuss in about 10 lines the steps taken by the British to distort Indian History.

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....

2)   What is the distinction between communal tension and communal politics?

....
....
....
....
....

3)   Why and how did the British encourage communal representation?

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....…………………………………...
....
....…………………….........................

18.7   GROWTH OF REGIONAL SENTIMENTS AND IDENTITY

An important development in the beginning of the 20th century was the growth of regional sentiments along linguistic lines. These sentiments were at times associated with the demand for

more jobs for under-privileged groups of educated youth, but often these had deeper roots as they were bound up with the emergence of "powerful literary and cultural trends in different regional languages" (Sumit Sarkar, `Modern India' Delhi, 1984).

About 1911, a movement began demanding a separate province in the Andhra districts of Madras. From 1913 onwards, annual Andhra conferences or Andhra Mahasabhas were held, and among other things, they demanded the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Though a clear cut demand for a linguistic state came only from the Andhra region, the development of regional languages led to the growth of various trends. For example, in Tamil Nadu, anti-Brahmin movements were closely associated with the formation of Tamil Sangams in various towns, which stimulated interest in ancient Tamil Classics.

Bengal had already exhibited a certain sense of regional unity and regional sentiments in 1905 in the wake of the then Vice-Roy Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal. What had contributed to such a growth was the evolution of a standard literary language, newspapers, periodicals, modern literature, and the general education and cultural developments of the nineteenth century, which gave the Bengalis a certain regional pride.

In Bihar, the demand for a separate province came under the leadership of Sachidanand Sinha, resulting in the formation of new provinces of Bihar and Orissa in 1911. Such a development of regional sentiments, which was not confined to any particular region but covered the entire Indian sub-continent, was a result of over centralization under the colonial rule, which undermined regional entities resulting in their break-up. Under the Mughals, the process of centralization took into consideration the existence of various entities such as Bijapur, Golkunda, Bihar, Orissa, Oudh, Allahabad, etc. But British rule in India by creating big Presidencies like Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, tried to bring various territorial and linguistic groups under one centralized control. A reaction to such a process was the intensification of regional consciousness and the demand for separate regional identities. However, it must be noted here that none of these regional sentiments were opposed to the nationalist movement.

The colonial policy of encouraging all forms of separatist tendencies was to prevent people from uniting under a common nationalist movement. The policy of divide and rule, particularly in the context of communalism, was implemented in various ways. The British administrators treated the Muslims as a separate community or political entity by acting upon the assumption that India. Moreover, it was assumed that India consisted of varied interests or communities and the most important of these were religious communities. Such a communal view of Indian society and politics was maintained and propagated right from the beginning of modern politics in India to the end of British rule.

In 1930, the Simon Commission referred to the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims as that of "a basic opposition manifesting itself at every turn in social custom and economic competitions, as well as in mutual religious antipathy." Therefore, it was believed that "representation of rival communities and different interests is the only principle, upon which, it has been found possible to constitute, by the method of direct election, the legislative bodies of India".

The national movement could not be weakened. At times, we find that certain regional issues were taken up at a national level. For example, the partition of Bengal in 1905 was not just a regional issue. Bengal, at this time, was in the forefront of the national movement. People all over

the country were able to understand the British motive of crushing the roots of nationalism by dividing Bengal. Hence, there were protests all over the country.

There is no dearth of such instances. Had regionalism been the dominant trend, why should have there been protests all over the country after the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy? It were only the people of Punjab who were massacred by the British. Similarly, Non-Cooperation Movement was a great success in the regions of coastal Andhra. Leadership as well as mass support for the national movement came from all the regions of the country.

In the context of the legacy of British rule, the problem of creating national unity is a serious one. One important and redeeming feature is, that whereas colonial rule acted as a prop to separatist tendencies, the state now is committed to a policy of secularism and removal of social and economic imbalances. The task, however, is difficult and the path tedious. There is a need to bring about a balanced economic development of all parts of the country, so that there are no imbalances between far-flung small states and the more centrally located states. Equal opportunity for education should be given to all to remove social imbalances. Instead of imposing any one language, all languages should be given equal opportunity for their development. Thus, in Hindi speaking areas, languages from the south should be encouraged and vice-versa. It is only through a process of mutual understanding and accommodation that linguistic barriers can be broken. Forceful imposition of one language may result in an equally forceful reaction, which may not be in the interest of national unity. Above all, the government as a custodian of national unity has to ensure that regional, sectarian, religious, caste or other forms of separatist sentiments are not exploited for transient petty gains like votes or other similar interests. To achieve these goals, it is essential to impress on the minds of the people at an impressionable age, the need for and the principles of national unity. For only then, a recurrence of what happened at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 can be prevented.

Check Your Progress 4

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

1)   How did the colonial policy encourage separatist divisions?

....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....
....…………………………………
……………………...

2)   How did the national movement see the growth of regional identities?

....
....
....
....

....
....………………………………………....................

3) Write a short note on how regional and linguistic identities can be brought into the national mainstream.

....
....
....
....
....
....………………………………………...............

18.8   LET US SUM UP

We have learnt in this unit the main impediments for national unity in the country and identified the major ones as Communalism and Regionalism. We have also examined how the British rule reinforced the nascent communal tensions prevalent in our society and used them, employing various techniques, to further their own ends. A divide and rule policy was helpful to the British in consolidating their hold over India - a jewel in the British Crown.

The legacy of communalism and regionalism was inherited by the independent Indian state. This historical legacy had only got accentuated in recent years, because of the problems generated by economic development and the resultant social changes.

The social changes and tensions which are quite natural in the course of development of a society, should not be allowed to aggravate and tear apart the very fabric of unity and integrity of the country. Foundations of secularism and integration are to be strengthened by the policies of the government. Resorting to communal politics should be discouraged, and instead, programmes involving cross-section of people in various development projects and schemes should be planned.

18.9   KEY WORDS

Syncretist : Tendencies in a culture which can bring diverse or different cultures or social groups together.

Shifting Cultivation : Cultivation which changes its site for production since the soil on which it is practised becomes useless after a few seasons. Lack of developed agricultural technology also led to this practice on good soils in earlier times.

Commercialization : Introduction of money and money relations in areas hitherto not affected by the same.

Episodic: Occurring briefly.

18.10   SOME USEFUL BOOKS

Chandra, Bipan : *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1984.

Sarkar, Sumit : *Modern India 1885-1947,* New Delhi.

Wallace, Paul (ed.) : *Region and Nation in India,* New Delhi.

18.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1)   i) X ii) ✔iii) ✔
2)   See Section 18.2. Your answer should include the nationalist writers' argument that India had from the ancient times possessed a unity.

Check Your Progress 2

1)   See Sub-section 18.4.2. Your answer should include :
        i)   penetration of simple tribal life by outsiders.
        ii)   ban on shifting cultivation due to creation of restricted forest zones by the British.
        iii)   attempt to monopolize forest wealth earlier available to all tribals.
        iv)   tribal rebellions

2)   i) ✔ii) ✔iii) X iv) ✔
3)   See Sub-section 18.4.3. Your answer should include :
        i)   the limited nature of British reform.
        ii)   conservative character of colonialism
        iii)   colonialism support to reactionary classes to strengthen itself.

Check Your Progress 3

1)   See Section 18.5. Your answer should include :
        i)   projection of India as a traditionally despot ruled land.
        ii)   stress on Hindu-Muslim divide in the past.
        iii)   colonialism's support to reactionary classes to strengthen itself.

2)   See Section 18.6. Your answer should include :
        i)   tension as a brief happening and politics as a long term phenomenon.
        ii)   mainly lower classes being involved in tension while upper and middle classes being involved in politics.
        iii)   role of communal ideology in bringing about communal riots.

3)   See Sub-section 18.6.1. Your answer should include :
        i)   the role of British belief which viewed India as comprising of separate communities.
        ii)   policy of divide and rule. For 'how', you should mention the role of separate

electorates and the communal award.

Check Your Progress 4

1)   See Section 18.7., Para 5. Your answer should include :
    i)   the role of the policy of divide and rule
    ii)   Communal view of Indian society by the British.
    iii)   ruthless suppression of the nationalists who opposed separatist tendencies. e.g., suppression of protest against partition of Bengal in 1905.

2)   See Section 18.7., Para 7. Your answer should include how opposition developed to :
    i)   partition of Bengal
    ii)   other parts of the country
    iii)   how various regions initiated nationalist struggles.

3)   See Section 18.7., last para. Your answer should include :
    i)   the role of secularism
    ii)   removal of social, economic imbalances
    iii)   the development of various languages and then a mutual understanding between persons speaking different languages
    iv)   role of government in ensuring that separatist and divisive trends or cultural differences are not used for petty political ends, and
    v)   role of education.