UNIT 11 COLONIALISM AND PATTERNS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS

Structure

11.0 OBJECTIVES

Decolonisation heralded the independence of the colonies and marks an important phase in world history. After going through the unit, you will be able to :

●   trace the cause of decolonisation

●   explain the patterns of struggle in winning independence, and

●   understand the role of the international organisations in the decolonisation process.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Colonialism appeared on the political horizon of the globe when European nations like Great Britain, France, Portugal, Spain and Holland build their empires over Asia, Africa and Latin America. The European powers exploited the resources of what came to be known as the third world countries and subjugated their people for about four centuries by their colonial and imperialist policies. The exploitation inevitably provoked its own contradictions in the form of national liberation and democratic movements. During the inter-war period (1919-1939) the colonies questioned the right of the coloniser to colonize and oppress the people of the third world. The process of decolonisation was accelerated with the end of Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations.

Although the general framework of colonial policies was economic exploitation and political subjugation, each colonial power followed specific policies in respect of their colonies. Likewise, while nationalist movements arose in almost all the colonies, the patterns of their struggle varied. Some colonies attained independence through constitutional means, while in some others, nationalism, attained a militant form. While some nationalist movements worked within the liberal democratic framework, yet some others adopted the Marxist ideology as their guiding philosophy. Post colonial political processes also varied according to the ideologies and nature of national liberation movements in the respective countries.

11.2 CAUSES FOR DECOLONISATION

Even before the Second World War, modern nationalism clocked as anti-imperialist movements arose in different colonies. It was a sense of identification with and pride in the nation state, as well as also the quest for power and national self-fulfillment. The birth of national organization in different colonies consolidated the national movements for independence. The psycological origins of nationalism are to be found in the fact that the introduction of European authority and culture disrupted the traditional life and institutions of the colonies. Those natives (as they were called by the white man) who received western education and were alienated from their own traditional milieu were never really treated as equals of the white man. It was among these elements that one finds the first signs of nationalist revolt. The superior economic and social status of the Europeans provoked a sense of revolt among the western educated elites of colonies. It is these 'elites' who first raised the banner of revolt and provided the leadership in the nationalist movements in the colonies.

Christian missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, spreading Christianity under the imperial banner, preached the ideals of universal brotherhood and love. The 'natives' who received missionary education questioned the right of colonisers to treat them as inferiors. The ideals of the French Revolution influenced the minds of the elite who imbibed the values of democracy and freedom.

Another ideology that made a powerful appeal to the oppressed of colonies was Marxism, Communists were influencing the nationalist movements in different colonies and were endeavouring to convert the same into communist movements. Western nations were being dubbed as imperialists and exploiters by the socialist camp. This emboldened the nationalist movements in the colonies and they were progressively veering towards the socialist camp. This emboldened the nationalist movements in the colonies and they were progressively veering towards the socialist block in whom they saw a sympathizer and a saviour.

The profound involvement of the United Nations in the post Second was period compelled the imperialist powers to withdraw from their colonies. The credit for the success of decolonisation and expansion of the world community goes to the UN. The UN has played a significant role by encouraging the aspirations of dependent people and by setting goals and standards which accelerated assistance to attain their freedom.

Apart from these external clauses there were three current of thought, rather ideologies, which expressed the nationalist aspirations of Afro-Asian people. One such current was the rise of Islam. As a non-European religion, Islam had an appeal and a tremendous propaganda value with its simple and democratic creed. In those Muslim countries which were colonised, Islam separated the natives from the Europeans. The pride of Islamic faith and the duty it imposes on Muslims to fight infidels gave a certain militancy to anti-colonial movements in Islamic countries. The contact with the west provoked an intellectual ferment and Islamic fraternity and solidarity.

The second of these currents of thought was Asiatism, centuries of Dutch colonial oppression in Indonesia and British in India, gave rise to nationalist sentiments and a certain sense of unity among the people. The Indian National Congress was formed in the year 1885 to lead the national moment. Other colonies such as Malaya, Indonesia and Burma refused to accept political suppression. Japan became an Asiatic strength and power. Though it was an imperialist power, it raised the slogan of 'Asia for Asians' in order to garb its imperialist ambition and to carry the Asians along with it. In China, Sun-yat-Sen led the nationalist revolt in 1911, which was followed by a long civil war and the final victory of the communist forces.

The third of these currents of thought was 'pan-Africanism'. By the end of the 19th Century, Africans were questionalist the European domination. The ideals and aspirations of the peoples of Africa was expressed in terms of pan-Africanism. Marcus Garvey was its most celebrated exponent. Du Boix was another champion of pan-Africanism and

made the League of Nations adopt a charter of Human rights for Africans. In later years Nikrumah of Ghana, became the leading ideologue of pan-Africanism.

After the end of First World War, the victorious powers, in a novel way, put the colonial territories under the mandatory system of the League of Nations. Article 22 of the Treaty of Versallies 1919, dealt with the future of these territories. Depending upon the varying degree of evolution, geographic factors, and economic situation these territories were divided into three different categories A, B, C, and placed under the mandate of the Allied Powers. In general the people of these territories were to be led to self-determination. The mandatory council of League of Nations was charged with the responsibility of supervising the administration of these territories. In 1917, A.J. Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, made his statement that a national place for the Jewish people would be found in politics without any prejudice to the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. The eventful establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the rise of militant Arab Nationalism have made the middle East one of the most sensitive areas in the East West conflict.

Check Your Progress 1

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

1)   What are the causes for the rise of national liberation movements?

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2)   Explain the ideological framework within which national liberation movements operated.

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11.3 DECOLONISATION PROCESS

The term 'decolonisation' is likely to give the impression that process of gaining independence was a peaceful one. However, this has been so. Colonisation itself was a violent process involving deceit, war and simple annexations by the colonial powers. The independence of the colonies was won by the people strugging in various forms. In some countries the process was relatively peaceful as in some of the French colonies of Africa like Senegal, the Ivory Coast in West Africa and in some British colonies such as Nigeria, Ghana etc. Some of the countries attained independence through the intervention of international organisations — the League of Nations and the United Nations.

Mandated territories under the League of Nations such as Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Tanganyika, Rwanda, Burundi, Cameroon, Pacific territories etc. either became independent or were placed under the Trusteeship council of the United Nations. The aims of these organisation was to lead these territories to self determination and eventually to independence. Most of them attained independence except South West Africa (now Namibia) which was under the Trusteeship of South Africa which pursued the policy of apartheid.

In the African colonies of Portugal — Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau — there was a long drawn armed struggle and they could not become independent until 1974 when Portugal herself witnessed a democratic revolution that overthrew the military dictator Salazaar.

The former French colony of Algeria too had to put up an armed struggle for seven long years from 1954 to 1961, while Morocco and Tunisia attained independence with comparative ease. The opposition of the French settlers in Algeria to its independence resulted in a violent struggle under the leadership of Ben Bella and Ferhat Abbas of National Liberation Front of Algeria (FNLA).

11.3.1 Latin America

In Latin America, independence was achieved by the Spanish and Portuguese colonies such before the African and Asian colonies. Revolutionary movements started in the Spanish colonies of Mexico and elsewhere and wars of independence developed in Venezuela, Argentina etc. by the early 19th century. By 1825 Spain lost her vast empire except Cuba and Puerto Rico. Unlike the North American struggle against the English against the English which led to the Thirteen colonies becoming the United States, the Spanish American revolts and wars of independence paved the way for seventeen separate republics.

Cuba and Puerto Rico continued under the corrupt rule of the Spanish until the United States became involved in the Cuban movement against Spain. Cuba not only fought a revolutionary was of independence against Spain, but also against US domination. The US drove Spain out of Cuba in 1898, but US investors then attained a dominant position in the island so that Cuba lost control over her own economic resources. Under the leadership of Fidel Castro, Cuba fought a guerrilla was against the dictatorial regime of Batista and overthrew him in December 1958. Later Castro expropriated US property, sought Soviet support and established a regime inspired by Marxism - Leninism. The ideological conflict between the United States and Cuba continues to this day even in the post Cold War era.

As early as 1823, the United States assumed the role of arbiter of the New World through the famous Munro doctrine, which, while recognizing the existing colonies or dependencies of European powers refused to permit any future colonization by any European power. This was, in fact, a part of British and American monoeuvres to promote their rival interests in Latin America.

11.3.2 Decolonisation after the Second World War

The process of decolonisation was accelerated after the Second World War. Some of the colonial territories like French, Indo-China, Dutch Indonesia, British Malaya and Italian East Africa were occupied by enemy conquest and were virtually cut off from their colonial governors. The Japanese occupation of South East Asia provided a filip to the nationalist sentiments and movements in the region by driving out the Western colonialists, removing them from strategic positions in the colonial administration and replacing many of these with natives. Finally, though quits authoritarian and oppressive the eventual collapse of the Japanese gave the nationalists an opportunity to seize the arms left by the defeated armies and gave a militant thrust to their struggles. Indonesia and Vietnam proclaimed their independence in this way. The Indonesian nationalists had to fight a long struggle for four years against the Dutch to gain their independence. In both cases, an open war was fought between the colonial power and the nationalist forces. In Vietnam, under the leadership of Viet Minh, after the 1954 cease-fire, the French withdrew from the northern parts of the country. In the South, a non-Communist government was installed. Later the French presence was replaced by the Americans. The long drawn heroic struggle of the Vietnamese against American imperialism is a legend in itself.

The most far-reaching historical outcome of World War II was undoubtedly the precipi-tate liquidation of nineteenth century empires and the contraction of Europe. The most momentous event was indeed the independence of India in 1947. The various present the independence of India in 1947. The various present and tribal revolts against the British and local land lords in different parts of the country and the rebellion of 1857, contributed to the rise of a nationalist Movement. The establishment of Indian National Congress gave an organisational expression to the movement.

Indian Nationalism was strongly influenced by Gandhi whose tenets were non-violence and non-cooperation. Gandhi's entry turned the movement into a mass movement. The transfer of power in India was facilitated after the labour Government came to power in Britain, though the vivisection of the country into India and Pakistan could not be avoided. The Cabinet Mission attempted to find a constitutional settlement. The partition of British India became investable. Although partition was not peaceful, it paved the way for the establishment of the Constitution.

Among the British African colonies, Gold Coast (Ghana since independence) and Nigeria became the pioneers of independence. In March 1957 the Gold Coast together with the Trust territory of Togo land became the independent state of Ghana with dominion status within the Commonwealth. Nkrumah, its Prime Minister, was a champion of African independence and an exponent of Post Africanism. The federation of Nigeria attained complete independence in 1960.

11.3.3 South Africa

The struggles of the African People in South Africa and Namibia deserve special attention in the history of decolonisation. Historically, the Dutch were the first to settle in South Africa in 1652 on the site of what is today modern Cape Town. The area of White settlement extended more rapidly in the first half of the 19th century with the coming of the British and the establishment of British colonial rule in the Cape Town in 1806, the Dutch settling Africaners were forced to leave the Cape and go north of the Orange river — culminating in the mass exodus, the Great Trek, in 1830s. This resulted in the formation of two independent Africaner republics, Orange Free State and transval, and the new British colony of Natal. In each of these, as in Cape Colony, racially stratified society developed with Whites assuming a position of dominance and the African being reduced to a state of serfdom. Although the declared policy of the British in the Cape and Natal was against discrimination, in practice, however, a property qualification restricted the franchise largely to Whites. In the Dutch Afrikaner republics, Africans were denied franchise, debarred from acquiring ownership of land in the Orange Free State and obliged to carry passes within the White occupied areas of Transval. The discovery of diamonds at Kimberly and large deposits of gold in the Transval after the end of the 19th century led to a scramble for control of these areas between the Dutch and the British, eventually leading to the defeat of the Dutch and the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, bringing together the Afrikaner republics of Orange Free State, Transval, Cape Colony and Natal. The Union of South Africa attained Dominion status and later became a sovereign independent state within the British Empire in 1934. In 1961 it broke its links with Great Britain, and left the Commonwealth to become a Republic.

The racist Government — the Apartheid regime — of South Africa denied even the most basic human rights to the Africans. The regime received support from many Western Governments which had strategic and economic interest in South Africa. As the African people had no legal rights nor freedom, opposition to the regime had to be clandestine. As the apartheid regime became increasingly brutal, African opposition to it also gained militancy. African resistance which began as cultural resistance to the White, eventually took the form of African National Congress in 1923 and Nelson Mandela emerged as its legendary leader. He was sentenced to life imprisonment following the Rivonia trail in 1963. Third world countries and the Non Aligned Movement supported the South African cause in international fora. In the eighties and early nineties the increasing international pressure both within the UN and from the Third World forced the Western nations to concede some of the demands of African countries. This forced the apartheid regime to agree to negotiate with African opposition. In 1993 Nelson Mandela was released from jail. After prolonged negotiations, elections were held in 1994. Thus, with the parliamentary elections, power was transferred to the black majority.

The former German colony of South West Africa (Namibia) came under the Mandate of South Africa. When the UN succeeded the League of Nations, South Africa claimed the Trusteeship over South West Africa, thus extending apartheid to the territory. The UN declared South African occupation as illegal and in 1967 the UN established the

Council for Namibia to administer the territory. After a long drawn struggle put by the South Western African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) and the implementation of UN resolutions, South West Africa attained independence to become Namibia.

Check Your Progress 2

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

1)   Distinguish between the various national movements in the Third World.

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2)   Write note on the Anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa.

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11.4   IMPACT OF DECOLONIZATION

As a sequel to decolonization and expansion of international community, international relations assumed a truly international character. After decolonization new and sovereign nations emerged in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These states became the battlefield of ideological competition and cold war. Their international importance was certainly heightened by this competition during the cold war. Naturally they opted for a foreign policy of neutralism in this period. They followed nonalignment as a symbol of new national prestige and dignity. They had articulated a new identity through their foreign policy orientation. Another important outcome is that the operation and working of UNO has undergone a sea-change owing to the presence of Afro-Asian nations. The United Nations has also reiterated their importance by openly aligning itself with the cause of their rising expectations. These countries have used the forum of the UN for pressing their demands on economic issues.

11.5   LET US SUM UP

The rise of colonialism marks an important chapter in the history of the world as it changed the relations between different parts of the world. Decolonisation as well as anti-imperialist struggles of the colonies gave rise to what is referred to as the Third World. These nationalist, anti-imperialist movements varied from country to country in their specifics. This was due to the patterns of colonial policies and their impact on colonial societies. There were those colonies which became independent through constitutional procedures and reforms; there were some which achieved independence through armed liberation struggles. Some attained independence due to international pressures and the intervention of organisations such as the League of Nations. However, these differences should not be over-emphasized. Practically all clones experienced violent oppression by the colonial powers. Even for those countries which attained independence through constitutional reforms it would be false to say that these struggles were always peaceful. Armed struggles became inevitable in some colonies due to the intransigence of colonial powers. However, there were ideological frameworks which differed depending upon the nature of the elite, national leaders and the participation of the people.

11.6 KEY WORDS

Apartheid : Policy of the racial segration. It had been practised in South African white people towards the black people.

Colonialism : A policy of acquiring and maintaining foreign country as colony and of exploiting it for the interest of the colonial power.

11.7 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

A. Vandana 1995 : **Theory of International Politics**; Vikas Publishing Co, New Delhi.

Hari Sharan Chabra: **UN and Decolonisation World Focus** No. 149, May 1992.

Henri Grimal, 1965 : **Decolonisation, the British, French, Dutch and Belgian Empires 1919-1963**; London.

Immanuel Wallertein 1961 : **Africa : the Politics of Independence**, Vintage Body, New York, Ny.

Rama S. Melkote 1992 : **International Relations**; Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.

11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

1. Exploitative character of foreign rule competed with the progressive developments in the international arena which are basically responsible for the rise of national liberation.

2. Ideologies like liberation, Marxism and many other progressive ideologies provided the framework.

Check Your Progress 2

1. There had not been an uniform national movement throughout the world. National movements emerged in different countries in the context of the ground realities of the country concerned.

2. It is basically a non-violent movement backed by the progressive world.