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# UNIT 35 LEGACIES OF THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT\*

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## Structure

- 35.1 Introduction
- 35.2 Uniqueness of the Indian National Movement
- 35.3 Legacies
  - 35.3.1 Making of the Indian Nation
  - 35.3.2 Mass Participation in Politics
  - 35.3.3 Promotion of Civil Liberties
  - 35.3.4 Economic Development based on Modern Science and Technology
  - 35.3.5 Secularism
  - 35.3.6 Independent Foreign Policy
- 35.4 Weaknesses and Limitations
- 35.5 Summary
- 35.6 Exercises

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## 35.1 INTRODUCTION

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This is the last Unit of the course. The purpose of this Unit is to provide an overview of the entire course. In particular it discusses the legacies of the national movement, and picks up those strands of the movement that have some relevance for independent India. In a way it tries to provide an answer to the question: what is living and what is dead about the Indian national movement? Or, rather, what ended in 1947 and what has continued since then? It is quite clear that agitations against British imperialism ended in 1947 with the attainment of freedom. But some traits and practices developed during the course of the movement continued to cast their shadow on the course of the development of Indian society after 1947. The Unit on legacies is essentially an attempt to take stock of such traits and practices.

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## 35.2 UNIQUENESS OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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Seen in a global context, the place of the Indian national movement in Indian history is broadly comparable to the place of French Revolution in the history of Europe and the Russian Revolution in Russian history. The Indian National Movement represented the largest possible consensus, particularly after 1920, when it came under Gandhi's leadership. The consensus enabled the legacy of the movement to endure and survive. The consensus generated during the national movement was not an inheritance; it did not already exist prior to the movement as a kind of an *a priori* reality. The consensus was created by the movement during its own life. This consensus rested on two pillars:

- Anti-imperialism
- A conception of national unity

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All those individuals and organisations that believed in, and practised, these two ideas could be considered to be a part of the national consensus, generated by the national movement. This creation of a minimum baseline criterion enabled the movement to create an ‘umbrella consensus’. This in effect implied that all categories of Indians except **loyalists** (those who remained loyal to the British and were a part of the support system built by British imperialism) and communalists (who did not share the idea of national unity and worked instead for the creation of standardised and homogenised religious-political communities) were a part of this consensus. This consensus was truly like a spectrum and a whole range of political strands were accommodated within it. Political trends as far apart from each other as the Revolutionaries, Communists, Socialists, Left-wingers within Congress, Right-wingers within Congress, Centralists, Constitutionalists, and Liberals, among others, could all retain their differences and yet be a part of the umbrella consensus. They were not required to abandon their basic political orientation in order to join the national movement. This consensus enabled the movement to retain considerable internal diversity yet maintain an over-all unity.

This plurality was an important uniqueness of the national movement. Apart from providing diversity to the nationalist struggle, it also enabled the movement to make smooth transition from a struggle to State power in 1947.

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### 35.3 LEGACIES

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The Indian National Movement left a rich legacy for independent India. But legacies do not naturally last forever. They do not have a self-sustaining capacity. They have got to be consciously nurtured and sustained with effort. For independent India this legacy was something like ‘ancestral wealth’; it could either be nurtured or thrown away.

So what is the legacy of the national movement which needs to be nurtured and remembered? There are in fact six crucial components of this legacy.

#### 35.3.1 Making of the Indian Nation

The Indian nationalism that evolved since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a variant of the generic global phenomenon called nationalism. But it also evolved some distinctive features of its own. In a nutshell, it was territorial (as against ethnic), civic (as against religious), plural (as against mono-cultural) and remarkably non-coercive. It tried to evolve national unity without seeking to impose it from the top. Its main tendency was homogenizing (as all nationalisms inevitably are) but without being unduly coercive. As mentioned above, anti-imperialism and national unity were the two major pillars that sustained the edifice of Indian nationalism.

*This* Indian nation was made essentially by the national movement and constitutes its major legacy. It is important to remember that a nation of Indian people did not already exist; it had to be created. The task of the national movement was not just to represent the Indian nation but also to create it. This was important because some of the British scholars, ethnographers and other commentators had virtually ruled out the possibility of nationhood for India. They did not look upon the Indian people as capable of evolving a common nationality. The 19<sup>th</sup> century

Indian nationalist response to this was to assert that the Indian people were a “nation-in-making”. This concept (articulated for the first time by the leading moderate leader Surendranath Bannerjea) consisted of a recognition in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the people of India, divided into regions, languages, castes and religions, were not a nation but they were on their way to acquiring a common nationhood. They were not *inherently* incapable of acquiring nationhood and their internal diversities, of caste, language, religion and region, were not a major hindrance in their journey towards nationhood.

When India became free in 1947, anti-imperialism - one of the two pillars of Indian nationalism – ceased to have any operative significance and was no longer a major constitutive element of Indian nationalism. What would now be the essential character of Indian nationalism? This was an important question and Nehru, independent India’s first prime minister, gave considerable thought to it. According to him, the Indian nation was to be based on economic development and an “emotional integration” of the people. Nehru understood that modern economic development, in a large and plural country like India, was bound to lead to initial disparities and displacements. It was not possible for Indian society to make its transition to industrial affluence without going through the pain and trauma of displacements. Such a situation could easily create social turmoil and tear apart the entire fabric of society. It was hoped that Indian nationalism would be able to neutralize these potential ill-effects inherent in the transition to industrialism. To put it differently, modern industrial development would rock the boat of Indian society; nationalism would help stabilize it. In one of his speeches, Nehru warned his audiences in a public meeting in 1957: “We are all in one boat, we have to go forward together. If some people begin to jump about in it, then the boat will not go forward but it will surely capsize.”

It is difficult to tell how the Indian nation has performed this role in independent India. It is however true that the Indian society in the 1950s was largely marked by a political consensus and social harmony, necessary pre-conditions to economic growth. But the subsequent decades witnessed considerable turbulence and erosion of harmony. There was also a questioning of the legitimacy of the Indian nation from certain quarters. The globalisation of Indian economy and rapid social changes since the 1990s have created new challenges for Indian nationalism. Only time will tell how the Indian nation will cope with the new challenges. As of now, it is important to recognise that this process of nation-in-making is an ongoing process. Both types of forces – those for and against this process – exist in the society. Certain trends are accelerating this process, but certain other trends are also leading to a disruption of this process. There is however no doubt that Indian nationalism constitutes one of the important legacies of the national movement and has an important role to play in the future of Indian society.

### **35.3.2 Mass Participation in Politics**

Democratisation of Indian politics and mass participation in politics was extremely important features of the national movement. The democratisation took the form of popular participation in the struggles conducted during the course of the movement. Indian democracy is not a gift of the British; it is a product of nationalist struggle for independence. During its life the trajectory of the national movement was like a constantly upward expanding spiral. Each phase of the struggle – from Swadeshi movement to Quit India – brought different segments

– urban population, peasants, workers, students, women, tribals – within the orbit of the national movement. Those groups that joined brought their own momentum and energies to the movement. Popular participation democratised and energized the struggle. A whole range of extremely innovative ways were devised by the ordinary people to carry forward their national movement.

Congress, the leading organisation of the struggle, started the tradition of taking the major decisions after due deliberations and in a democratic manner. Many of the major decisions taken by Congress, for instance launching of the non-cooperation movement in 1920, acceptance of office by Congress in provinces in 1937, and launching of Quit India, were taken after a great deal of debate and discussion. Often the differences within Congress were so serious that they threatened to split the organisation. Congress came quite close to a split with serious differences developing between pro-changers and no-changers after 1922, on the question of entering the legislatures. The split was eventually avoided by the formation of Swaraj party *within* Congress in 1923. Likewise serious differences developed between the Left-wing of Congress, represented by Nehru and Subhas Bose, and the Right-wing represented by Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari, in the 1930s. But these differences were also resolved through debate, discussions and mutual compromises. This could be possible only because of a democratic functioning of the Congress and of the national movement.

After 1947, the Indian constitution adopted the model of parliamentary democracy based on universal adult franchise. The adoption of universal adult franchise came in for quite a bit of scrutiny particularly by some foreign observers. They obviously felt that the low level of literacy in India was not very conducive to opening the society for a full democracy. But the leaders of the national movement thought otherwise. Their contention was that if the illiterate masses of India could participate actively in the national movement, they were mature enough to take independent political decisions and elect their own government. The leaders' faith in the people was obviously rooted in their experience of the national movement and in the practices developed during the national movement. As a result of adopting universal adult franchise, Indian society experienced in 1952 the largest general election in the history of the world. Since then successful elections at the Centre and in states, change of government and the defeat of the ruling parties have become the essential features of Indian politics.

It has to be emphasised that the democratisation of the political structure is easily the biggest achievement of independent India. The main reason why Indian society (with low literacy rate, precarious economic development, and persistent presence of many authoritarian traditions in the society) has successfully adapted to democracy is largely because of the practices evolved during the course of the national movement. It was during the course of the nationalist struggle that the people of India internalised the democratic values and incorporated them in their political behaviour. The Indian democracy today is flourishing and vibrant, though far from perfect. During the last six decades, it has grown and expanded its base considerably. Interestingly, the trajectory it has followed is very similar to that followed during the course of the nationalist struggle. Various groups of Indian people joined the struggle not at one go but in stages. The movement, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represented at best the middle class urban men, confined to certain pockets of the country. But soon it broke out of the elite fold and began to incorporate students, religious minorities, peasants, women, workers

and tribals in its fold. This is broadly how Indian democracy has proceeded in independent India. Various political and social groups joined Indian democracy in phases and thus enriched it. The major political conflicts in independent India have been conducted *within* the democratic framework, not *about* it. The Indian democracy has also provided enough confidence to its marginalized people – women, tribals, Dalits, Muslims – to launch their specific struggles on their own, without seeking any outside mediation, and by making use of the democratic option. Indian democracy has also worked towards a resolution of conflicts and has enabled the society as a whole to throw up some areas of consensus, though often in a messy, loose and incoherent kind of way.

### 35.3.3 Promotion of Civil Liberties

Tremendous focus on civil liberties is another major legacy of the national movement. From the very beginning the leaders of the national movement showed concern for civil liberties, namely freedom of the press, speech and association. The freedom of press was very central to early nationalist leadership, because their main political activities were conducted primarily through the press. Gopal Krishna Gokhale was probably the first Indian leader who looked upon education as a basic human right. Although he had always argued against heavy taxation levied by the British, but he was willing to support the existing taxes if British took the responsibility for compulsory primary education. S.N. Banerjea was the first nationalist leader to go to jail for criticizing the British through his journalistic writings. Later under Gandhi's leadership, courting arrest voluntarily became a major political activity of the national movement, when thousands of people offered to go to jail.

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lokmanya Tilak began demanding adult franchise, even though it did not exist in Britain till 1928. As part of their commitment to human rights, the Indian leadership, led by Motilal Nehru and Tej Bahadur Sapru, prepared a national constitution in 1928. Generally known as Nehru Report, it recommended the declaration of fundamental rights, a parliamentary system of government, adult franchise and an independent judiciary. Even though the Nehru Report was rejected by the British, it firmly put on the ledger the uncompromising commitment of the national movement to issues of civil liberties and human rights. In 1936, at the initiative of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian Civil Liberties Union (ICLU) was formed along non-party lines for the promotion of civil liberties. Its first circular, drafted by Nehru, stated: "It is proposed to start an Indian Civil Liberties Union, the sole function of which will be the protection of civil liberties in all departments of national activities.... The first object of this Union would be to collect data and give publicity to it. Other activities, such as the organization of public opinion to resist all encroachment on civil liberties would follow." The ICLU was the precursor to the main civil liberty and human rights organizations that developed in independent India.

But it was Gandhi, above all, who provided the clearest and sharpest outline of what should constitute a human right. In 1922, he wrote in his weekly *Young India*: "We must first make good the right of free speech and free association. We must defend these elementary rights with our lives." His definition of these rights was: "Liberty of speech means that it is un-assailed even when the speech hurts; liberty of the press can be said to be truly respected when the press can comment in the severest terms upon and even misrepresent matters. Freedom of

association is truly respected when assemblies of people can discuss even revolutionary projects.”

It should thus be clear that the Indian national movement provided a robust human rights framework to be pursued in independent India. However, the fate of human rights in independent India has not remained consistent and at the same level throughout the period. There have been times when the society as a whole has suffered from a deficit of human rights and liberties either because of a tilt of the State and its institutions towards authoritarianism, or because of intolerance displayed by one section of society towards other members. Even so, it has to be said that in comparison with many other societies, India certainly enjoys a healthy respect for civil and human rights of the people. There is no doubt that the human rights perspective, in howsoever a limited measure, practised by the Indian society, is an inheritance from the dominant practices developed during the course of the national movement.

### **35.3.4 Economic Development based on Modern Science and Technology**

Almost from the very beginning of the national movement, the leadership developed a vision of a future India as a modern industrial society and economy. The economy was to be based on industrialism making full use of modern science and technology, as had happened in Europe. In fact, their blueprint of India of the future was that of a country which would resemble a European country. As this vision developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it assigned a central role to the State in leading India's transformation to an affluent industrial society. This vision was codified in the famous Congress resolution on fundamental rights and economic programme, passed at its Karachi session in 1931. The resolution clearly stated: “The State shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of public transport.” There was a substantial consensus within Congress that Independent India would strive to become a modern democratic industrial society.

However it is important to emphasize that whereas this was the dominant vision of the future, it was not the only one. At any rate there existed at different points in time two rival perspectives on the future economic development of India, which competed with the mainstream view. First was the vision of a socialist economic development as against a capitalist one. This perspective developed in the 1930s and was led by Nehru and other Left-wing leaders within Congress. According to this perspective, India was to develop as a modern industrial society, but without a dominant role by the capitalist class. The economic policies would be formulated keeping in mind the interests of the large majority of peasants and workers and the excessive concentration of wealth and resources in the hands of the few would be discouraged. Nehru posited capitalism and socialism as two choices before the country and clearly opted for socialism. In 1933 he declared that “capitalism means the developed system of production for profit based on private ownership of means of production.” Socialism, on the other hand, meant “the ending of private property, except in a restricted sense, and the replacement of the present profit system by a higher ideal of cooperative system.” Socialism meant above all the “nationalization of the instrument of production and distribution.” However, this view of India's economic development was held only by some people. Many others in the leadership advocated the development

of India as a modern capitalist society. The consensus that emerged was precisely on those aspects of modern economic development that were in common to both the perspectives, namely, modern industrial development based on science and technology and an important role for the State in promoting key sectors of the economy. This consensus was fully reflected in the formation of a National Planning Committee in 1938 under the chairmanship of Nehru. The Planning Committee was a precursor to the National Planning Commission that was set up in 1950 with the prime minister as its chairman.

The other important perspective was held by Gandhi and some of his followers in the national movement. This perspective was based on decentralisation of resources, minimal use of modern technology, autonomy for the villages and the creation of rural industries. This view was articulated by Gandhi who often showed his reservations for modern economic development based on science and technology and did not share the thinking of the mainstream Congress leadership on the future economic policy. However, it has to be said that he did not at any point confront the mainstream view and certainly did not insist on an inclusion of his economic views into the mainstream economic policy of the national movement. It is necessary to point out here that the famous Karachi resolution on fundamental rights and economic programme, mentioned above, was drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru, presided over by Sardar Patel, and moved in the open session by none other than Gandhi himself!

This mainstream view on economic development constituted an important legacy of the national movement for the economic development of independent India. Having critiqued the industrial revolution earlier in 1930s, Nehru recognised its importance and said in a speech to university students in 1958: “The greatest revolution in the world has in fact been not the French Revolution or the American or Chinese or the Russian Revolution but the Industrial Revolution, the electric revolution and the atomic revolution because they are changing the entire pattern of our lives.” It was along these lines that the Indian revolution had to be built.

### **35.3.5 Secularism**

The Indian national movement was organised along secular lines and remained fully committed to secularism till the very end. However this commitment to secularism took different forms. Congress at its Allahabad session in 1887, resolved that it would not take up any question pertaining to religious communities if the majority of that community was opposed to that issue being taken up. Through their articulations, pronouncements and activities, the leaders of the national movement promoted the ideas of separation of religion from politics and State, treatment of religion as a private matter for the individual, symmetrical treatment by the State towards all religions and religious communities, no discrimination on the basis of religion, and active opposition to communalism. All these ideas were pushed ahead in different forms and in different ways at different points in time. The famous Karachi resolution of 1931, for instance, declared that in free India “every citizen shall enjoy freedom of consciousness and the right freely to profess and practise his religion” and that all citizens would be “equal before the law, irrespective of caste, creed or sex in regard to public employment, office of power or honour” and that “the State shall observe neutrality in regard to all religions.” The Karachi resolution was to remain the linchpin of the basic normative orientation of the national movement towards the major political and economic questions of the day.

However there was a slight difference in the manner in which Gandhi and Nehru, two important leaders of the movement, approached the question of secularism. Though deeply committed to it, they articulated their commitments differently. Gandhi often defined his political commitment in religious terms, because he saw Religion primarily as a source of morality. He was a deeply religious person and he had no hesitation in extending his religious affiliation to all religions, since he saw morality at the base of all religions. In his writings, Gandhi made a conceptual distinction between ‘Religion’ (written with a capital ‘R’) and ‘religions’ (in plural, written with a small ‘r’ used denominationally for different religions). He then declared: “Religion is one. But religions are many.” Religion for him stood for a moral order, which was common to all religions. Gandhi highlighted this distinction of ‘one and many’ in another way. He argued that ‘Religion’ was the root of the tree and ‘religions’ were different branches of the same tree. With such an understanding of Religion, Gandhi openly said that his politics was derived from Religion (i.e., morality). He had no hesitation in openly declaring that for him Religion and politics were not separate but connected to each other. However, in the 1930s Gandhi experienced that a combination of religion and politics produced communalism. He then started arguing in 1940s that “Religion is a private matter which should have no place in politics.” He emphasised again in 1947: “Religion is a personal affair of each individual. It must not be mixed up with politics or national affairs.” Gandhi’s views on religion and secularism should therefore not be seen as contradictory. There is deeper unity and consistency between his total commitment to Religion and also to secularism.

Jawaharlal Nehru approached this question in a different manner. Deeply disturbed by the emergence of communal politics in the 1920s Nehru saw religion as a problem and implicated in the politics of communalism. He equated religion with superstition, irrationalism and intolerance. He therefore felt that a genuine secular polity could be established only if the influence of religion in society was kept to the minimum. In a letter, written in 1926, Nehru argued that the only solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem was to “scotch our so called religion.... How long that will take I cannot say but religion in India will kill that country and its people if not subdued.” At this stage Nehru’s understanding of secularism was based on a separation of religion and politics and did not allow for any role for religion in social and political life.

However it is interesting that just as Gandhi in 1940s came close to Nehru’s position, Nehru also came quite close to Gandhi’s basic position on this question. From total opposition to religion in 1920s, Nehru developed a more complex and nuanced position on religion and its role in social life, particularly after 1947. On the one hand, Nehru looked at religion as “blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation and the preservation of vested interests.” But, on the other hand, it was also a moral force “which supplied a deep inner craving of human beings ...[and] which has brought peace and comfort to innumerable tortured souls.” Nehru was very conscious that any attempt to withdraw religion from social life might create a moral vacuum for people.

With this convergence and synergy of ideas between Gandhi and Nehru, the dominant conception of secularism that developed in independent India was neither anti-religion nor was it based on a denial of religion in social life. It was rather based on an opposition to communalism and to any discrimination on the



basis of religion. There is no doubt that this dominant model of Indian secularism derives entirely from the ideas and practices evolved during the course of the national movement, and constitutes its significant legacy.

### 35.3.6 Independent Foreign Policy

It is not very usual for anti imperialist struggles to have a foreign policy of their own. Foreign policies are normally the preserve of sovereign state systems and not of movements struggling for sovereignty. However the Indian national movement was quite distinctive in this respect in that it showed a tremendous concern with the question of a foreign policy. It evolved an internationalist framework of policy during the course of the movement, which served to provide the blueprint for the foreign policy practised by the State in independent India.

Almost from the very beginning, the Congress leaders refused to accept the British position on major international issues and developed an independent perspective of their own. From the Congress platform, they made a critique of the British policy of annexation and conquests abroad. When the British annexed upper Burma (present-day Myanmar) and made it a part of British India, the Congress leaders opposed it. Their opposition was only partly based on the heavy cost of all such conquests, which had to be met from Indian resources. It also emanated out of a respect for the territorial integrity of another country.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century these critiques culminated in a concrete policy of opposition to interference by one country in another. When the British tried to interfere in the affairs of Persia and Turkey, the Congress leaders voiced their opposition to it. They were particularly agitated on the fate of Turkey because the Caliph, the Sultan of Turkey, was also considered the spiritual leader of Muslims all over the world. At its 1912 session, the Congress president expressed the “profound sorrow and sympathy” felt by all the non-Muslim Indians for their Muslim brethren for the misfortunes of the Caliphate. Later, at the end of the First World War, Gandhi actually led the Khilafat movement in support of the Khalifa. The movement was fought for a restoration of the power and prestige of the Khalifa of Turkey, which had been promised by the British during the War, and denied subsequently.

Once the national movement came under the active leadership of Gandhi, with Jawaharlal Nehru as his deputy, it acquired truly global dimensions. The new perspective was based on a championship of the twin values of freedom and peace *everywhere*, and for every country. Indian independence was seen as an important component of this project of world peace. It was actually in 1921 that Congress stated its own independent foreign policy. Delinking itself from the foreign policy of the British, Congress highlighted peace, freedom and global cooperation as the necessary building blocks in its foreign policy. This was perhaps the first example of a colony, under imperialist domination, declaring its own independent foreign policy. Gandhi declared: “While we are making our plans for Swaraj, we are bound to consider and define our foreign policy. Surely we are bound authoritatively to tell the world what relations we wish to cultivate with it.”

Once Congress dissociated itself from the British foreign policy, it began to support freedom struggles by other Asian countries against European imperialism. It expressed solidarity with the struggles of Arabs, Egypt, Burma, Sri Lanka and

China. Gandhi began to talk of an Asian Federation, committed to freedom and peace. Nehru attended the International Congress of Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels in 1927. This really internationalised the Indian struggle for freedom. India and China came close together for the first time. The national movement now began to openly express solidarity with all the struggles against Western imperialism. At Nehru's initiative, Congress affiliated itself with the League against Imperialism set up at Brussels. Congress now declared from its platform that the Indian struggle was part of a great world struggle against the very system of Imperialism. In the same year, 1927, Nehru visited the Soviet Union on the occasion of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and was very impressed with the transformation in the social conditions in a short span of time. The British foreign policy in India had been largely shaped by a kind of Russo-phobia. Nehru demolished this myth and provided a new vantage point from where the Soviet Russia appeared more like an ally rather than an aggressor. It was also at Brussels that Nehru became aware of the problems of Latin Americans, groaning under the weight of American imperialism, through his contacts with the Latin American delegates. Later, in the 1930s and 40s, the Indian national movement took a stand on Spanish Civil War, expressed solidarity with the Chinese people in their struggle against Japanese aggression and declared its firm, uncompromising opposition to Fascism.

The sum total of the foreign policy as practiced by the national movement was a combined commitment both to Indian nationalism and internationalism. Nehru took the lead in this but he was supported by Gandhi and other leaders of the movement. Nehru realised that the British imperialism could not be defeated till Imperialism as a whole was dismantled. It was in this sense that each colony of Asia and Africa needed to fight against its imperialist power but also fight collectively against Imperialism as a system. The two struggles, the nationalist and the global, needed to complement each other in order for both to be successful.

It was also during this period that Gandhi developed the practice of making appeals to the people of other countries. He wrote letters to 'every Briton', 'every Japanese' and also to 'American friends'. He chided the people of Japan for Japanese aggression in China. In sheer desperation, Gandhi even wrote a letter to Hitler, imploring him to prevent the War "which may reduce humanity to a savage state."

This was the major legacy of the national movement to the leaders of independent India. There is no doubt that the edifice of a foreign policy in independent India was based on the foundations laid during the national movement. When India became independent in 1947, some of its foreign policy priorities, both immediate and long-term, were: i) end of colonialism and the prevention of its re-emergence in some other form; ii) defining its political and strategic worldview in the new conflict between the Western allies led by the USA and the Socialist group led by the USSR; and iii) what relations to adopt vis-a-vis the neighbouring countries, particularly China and Pakistan. In formulating independent India's response to these questions, the Indian government went by the policy standards that had been set during the course of the national movement. It has to be said that in spite of setbacks (e.g., the China War in 1962), the foreign policy framework evolved in independent India has stood the test of time and owes in no small measure to the practices and the perspective adopted by the Indian national movement.

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## 35.4 WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

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After making a positive appraisal of the Indian National Movement and its relevance for independent India, it is perhaps necessary to point out certain areas of weakness and shortcomings that accompanied the movement. It is generally said that a people get the nation they deserve, and vice-versa. Nowhere is this truer than in the case of the Indian national movement. Because the movement was truly representative of Indian society and people, it also carried their strengths and weaknesses within its fold. So, even as the movement initiated a transformation of the Indian society in a modern direction, it was also transformed by the society. This dialogical relationship between the movement and the society had one great advantage that the movement remained firmly rooted to the Indian soil. But it also carried a disadvantage. It curtailed the capacity of the movement to carry out a rapid and radical transformation of the Indian social structure in a modern direction. As a result the society that emerged after 1947, contained not just the positive features of the Indian tradition, but also some of its negative features (such as hierarchy, patriarchy, caste prejudices, among others). It is indeed strange that the truly representative capacity of the movement, which strengthened it, also limited its transformative potentials.

At the local level, the national movement was not carried out by doctrinally trained political cadre but by ordinary men and women. Also the channels of control at the top were held rather loosely. Considerable autonomy was exercised by the participants of the movement at various levels. This lack of strict control from the top, along with multiple diversities that existed in the movement as well as in the society, meant that the movement as a whole was never completely free from centrifugal pressures and fissiparous tendencies. It was also clear that if these tendencies developed and grew stronger, the leadership of the movement would find it very difficult to handle these pressures successfully. The development of such political tendencies and the inability of the Congress leadership to successfully counter it actually resulted in the partition of the country and the national unity being compromised. However it has to be added that in order to be free from both the possible shortcomings (incapacity for radical transformation and the inability to force national unity), the national movement would have had to be structured along very different lines. As it happens both the weaknesses of the national movement have also carried to the very fabric of society in independent India.

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## 35.5 SUMMARY

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In this, the final Unit of the course, the following points were highlighted:

- The Indian national movement represented an extremely large consensus of the Indian people against British imperialism. Although elements of anti-imperialism existed among sections of the population prior to the movement, it was really transformed into a national and nationalist force during the course of the movement. The movement was based on the twin ideas of anti-imperialism and national unity. It was organised like a platform and anyone who believed in these two ideas could become a part of this consensus.
- The movement practised and upheld the version of Indian nation that was territorial, civil and non-coercive. These features set the benchmarks for the direction in which the Indian nation was to grow after 1947.

- The mass participation in politics and a programmatic commitment to secularism made sure that both democracy and secularism developed as the major ideas and ideals in independent India.
- The national movement paid special attention to the question of civil liberties and also developed an independent foreign policy framework.
- However, an incapacity for a radical social transformation and an inability to effectively deal with centrifugal and fissiparous forces were two notable weaknesses of the national movement. These weaknesses too appear to have carried into the body politic of independent India. It can therefore be concluded that society and politics in independent India may be considered to have lived under the shadows of the national movement.

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## **35.6 EXERCISES**

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- 1) Discuss the role played by the Indian nationalist movement in emphasising the principles of democracy and secularism in independent India.
- 2) Do you think that the nationalist movement was responsible for evolving a policy framework for economic development in independent India?
- 3) Analyse the weaknesses and limitations of the legacies of the nationalist movement in India.