

## 6 Nationalism and Imperialism

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century nationalism no longer retained its idealistic liberal-democratic sentiment of the first half of the century, but became a narrow creed with limited ends. During this period nationalist groups became increasingly intolerant of each other and ever ready to go to war. The major European powers, in turn, manipulated the nationalist aspirations of the subject peoples in Europe to further their own imperialist aims.

The most serious source of nationalist tension in Europe after 1871 was the area called the Balkans. The Balkans was a region of geographical and ethnic variation comprising modern-day Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovenia, Serbia and Montenegro whose inhabitants were broadly known as the Slavs. A large part of the Balkans was under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The spread of the ideas of romantic nationalism in the Balkans together with the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire made this region very explosive. All through the nineteenth century the Ottoman Empire had sought to strengthen itself through modernisation and internal reforms but with very little success. One by one, its European subject nationalities broke away from its control and declared independence. The Balkan peoples based their claims for independence or political rights on nationality and used history to prove that they had once been independent but had subsequently been subjugated by foreign powers. Hence the rebellious nationalities in the Balkans thought of their struggles as attempts to win back their long-lost independence.

As the different Slavic nationalities struggled to define their identity and independence, the Balkan area became an area of intense conflict. The Balkan states were fiercely jealous of each other and each hoped to gain more territory at the expense of the others. Matters were further complicated because the Balkans also became the scene of big power rivalry. During this period, there was intense rivalry among the European powers over trade and colonies as well as naval and military might. These rivalries were very evident in the way the Balkan problem unfolded. Each power – Russia, Germany, England, Austro-Hungary – was keen on countering the hold of other powers over the Balkans, and extending its own control over the area. This led to a series of wars in the region and finally the First World War.



**Fig. 20 — A map celebrating the British Empire.**

*At the top, angels are shown carrying the banner of freedom. In the foreground, Britannia — the symbol of the British nation — is triumphantly sitting over the globe. The colonies are represented through images of tigers, elephants, forests and primitive people. The domination of the world is shown as the basis of Britain's national pride.*

Nationalism, aligned with imperialism, led Europe to disaster in 1914. But meanwhile, many countries in the world which had been colonised by the European powers in the nineteenth century began to oppose imperial domination. The anti-imperial movements that developed everywhere were nationalist, in the sense that they all struggled to form independent nation-states, and were inspired by a sense of collective national unity, forged in confrontation with imperialism. European ideas of nationalism were nowhere replicated, for people everywhere developed their own specific variety of nationalism. But the idea that societies should be organised into 'nation-states' came to be accepted as natural and universal.

## Write in brief

- Write a note on:
  - Guiseppe Mazzini
  - Count Camillo de Cavour
  - The Greek war of independence
  - Frankfurt parliament
  - The role of women in nationalist struggles
- What steps did the French revolutionaries take to create a sense of collective identity among the French people?
- Who were Marianne and Germania? What was the importance of the way in which they were portrayed?
- Briefly trace the process of German unification.
- What changes did Napoleon introduce to make the administrative system more efficient in the territories ruled by him?

Write in brief

## Discuss

- Explain what is meant by the 1848 revolution of the liberals. What were the political, social and economic ideas supported by the liberals?
- Choose three examples to show the contribution of culture to the growth of nationalism in Europe.
- Through a focus on any two countries, explain how nations developed over the nineteenth century.
- How was the history of nationalism in Britain unlike the rest of Europe?
- Why did nationalist tensions emerge in the Balkans?

Discuss

## Project

Find out more about nationalist symbols in countries outside Europe. For one or two countries, collect examples of pictures, posters or music that are symbols of nationalism. How are these different from European examples?

Project