
UNIT 15 FORMATION OF NATION-STATES-1 BRITISH AND FRENCH

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we discuss the process of nation-states formation in Britain and France, particularly from the second half of the eighteenth century. After reading this Unit, you will be able to explain:

- how the absolute monarchies initiated the process of nation-states formation,
- problems faced in the work of national unification,
- process of integration in both the countries,
- creation of infrastructure for capitalist development,
- development of national identities through class formation,
- the role of industrial revolution in Britain and the French Revolution in the creation of respective nation-states,
- spheres of state intervention, and
- creation of modern democratic states absorbing social tension and regional variations.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of nation-states may be seen in terms of changing forms of production and more specifically, of the rise of bourgeoisie. The new form of state in Britain and France provided a series of solutions to the problems of modernization. The nation-states in both countries contributed to the process of social and economic integration of smaller units. The role of nation-states in capitalist development was crucial because they contributed to political and economic unification and enabled peripheral regions to benefit from the process of capitalist modernization. Simultaneously, the state had to create conditions

for economic growth. Industrialization brought several demands to the forefront which could be resolved only through centrally controlled systems and institutions. These states created patriotic fervour by recruiting professional armies and navies directly from the populations and imposed nationalism, literacy, homogenization and reform from above. The emergence of nation-state is a modern phenomenon seen in late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but its origin may be traced to the early-modern period. The main trends of this multi-dimensional process include the consolidation of territorial units through bureaucratic governance, transformation of frontiers, delimiting various states into well-marked borders, the emergence of a bourgeoisie and a fundamental change in the relationship between rulers and ruled. It can be said that the rise of absolutist states in Britain and France under strong monarchies in the early modern period was of crucial significance for this was a formative state in the making of the modern world which helped resolve issues of late medieval and early modern society. From these transformed absolutist states developed nation-states in Britain and France.

15.2 FORMATION OF THE BRITISH NATION-STATE

It is difficult to demarcate the outer limits of the British nation-state because when people in Britain especially in England, talk of their 'nation' it is not always clear which state they have in mind. England can best be termed as the dominant nation within the multinational state known as the United Kingdom. It is not easy to distinguish the nation of 'Britishness' from that of 'Englishness'. It appears that some elements of British identity developed among the Welsh, Scottish and English over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet for the Scots and Welsh there remains to this day a clear distinction between a political identification with the British state and an ethnic or national identification with Scotland or Wales. The fourth state, Ireland, clearly reflects a feeling of alienation even though it was united with Britain.

15.2.1 Process of Integration

The early attempts at nation-state building were made by English monarchs, especially of the Tudor dynasty (1485-1603) through a centralized system or government. Parliament became the major institution (having a history of continuous existence since 1275 A.D.) through which collaboration was secured with the upper classes for the purpose of centralization. England became a political society in which centralized monarchy had to exist along with agglomerated local interests represented through Parliament. The sixteenth century saw the integration of English towns into a single unit. Most internal barriers were eliminated through economic regulations of the State. It was possible not only by the concentration of power in the crown but also by England's comparatively smaller surface area. The expansion of the urban market made the entire kingdom a unified market. London was a major unifying force creating demand for food and putting pressure on agricultural production encouraging commercialization and capital investments in the countryside.

Another significant development in the creation of the nation-state was the progress of religious reform. The Reformation not only subordinated the national church to the king but it also subordinated country to city. It reflects rising spirit against foreign domination by Papal authority. In the reign of Elizabeth, upsurge

of literature, religious sentiments, rise of new social classes and changing political ideas-all contributed to rise of the English nation-state. The Anglican Church provided a strong foundation to the state. Later, the Anglican clergy helped in fulfilling a vision of leading missionaries by training people to be obedient and respectful subjects and patriots, living for the benefit of the state. Parish clergymen held special commemorative services to mark important occasions according to the state calendar. In their regular sermons the bishops reminded the children and their parents of their paramount duty of 'obedience to the King and quiescence in the State'. However, after the coming of industrialization, anti-Catholic and nationalist appeals by the church gradually became less effective.

Wales

An important step from the point of view of national integration was the Union of Wales with England in 1536. It was imposed from above under Henry VIII. Wales was required to send 24 members to English Parliament and the English system of shire administration was introduced to check local liberties and turbulence. However, Wales maintained its own distinct culture and society till as late as the 1880s, and exhibited Welsh traits in contrast to English, including use of their own language. There were also attempts at cultural revival to resist inroads of Anglican cultures and English language. However, industrialization brought about the transformation of a peasant-dominated backward agrarian region into a modern democratic society. The rapid expansion of mining and manufacturing activities had a profound impact on the Welsh population, leading to urbanization, growth of industrial centres, large-scale migrations, the emergence of working class and labour movements, and the spread of Anglican education, thereby integrating all of Wales with the English State.

Scotland

Scotland was persistently hostile to England despite the dynastic marriage alliance. It had been an independent state for centuries. James I's proposals for a 'perfect union' of the two countries found in the early seventeenth century because of the mutual distrust and hostility between the English and the Scots. The Cromwellian union of the 1650's was arbitrarily imposed by an English army upon the Scots. Scotland was finally united with England by the Act of Union in 1707. This was a voluntary union supported by a majority in the Scottish Parliament, which thereafter ceased to exist. However, other Scottish institutions remained intact, including a distinctive legal and educational system and a Presbyterian Church.

The Scottish response to the Union varied from poor and backward Gaelic Highlands to English speaking Lowlands. The manner in which the Act was forced through remained a source of grievance to many Scottish nationalists. The intrinsic view of Scottish identity generated a separate consciousness over the centuries. It was nurtured by folk memory of past heroes including Queen Mary, folk songs and contributions of Scottish intellectuals like David Hume and Adam Smith, and inventive geniuses like James Watt. During the nineteenth century the immense industrial development of the country destroyed older pattern of life and integrated the economy of Scotland with that of England. The success of the industrial revolution persuaded the Scottish and later Welsh middle classes to merge their loyalties with those of the English into a new loyalist to the British nation. The acceptance of the Scottish bourgeoisie to integration with Britain is evident from the fact that Scotland was now called North Britain; the first railway

in Scotland was called North British Railway and a number of hotels were called North British Hotels. By the end of nineteenth century the idea of Britain became more widespread and people saw themselves as belonging to Scotland and Wales and along with that to Britain.

Ireland

The Story of Union with Ireland is one of the political failures of the British nation-state and became the most troubled aspect of governance. Ireland was partially conquered by English landowners by late sixteenth century, it then, virtually, became an English colony. The constant uprisings of the Catholic peasantry against Anglican landlords led to frequent sending of troops to Ireland. The Irish Parliament at Dublin was essentially a parliament of conquerors and settlers with strong bias against the Roman Catholic majority of Ireland. In 1798 there was an Irish revolt. English authorities feared that Catholic Irishmen might support French revolutionaries. Thus, Ireland was formally united with England, Scotland and Wales in 1800 to form the United Kingdom.

The Irish Union failed for several reasons. The Union did not lead to major economic changes nor to industrialization, except in the region of Belfast. The English conquest did not promote the emergence of an anglicised middle class, as had happened in Wales. The Catholic Church of Ireland was suppressed by English settlers, and the only university at Dublin was for Protestant students. The last years of the nineteenth century saw a great flowering of Irish literature and culture. Dublin saw the emergence of a brilliant group of poets, playwrights and novelists like George Moore, J.M. Synge, W.B. Yeats, George Russell and James Joyce. Meanwhile the Gaelic Athletic Association tried to popularize traditional Irish sports. The creation of a Nationalist party the Sinn Fein (1905), spread of the Home Rule Movement, and popular nationalist uprisings (1891-1921) under the Irish Republican Army eventually led to the partition of Ireland. Northern Ireland retained its loyalty to the British crown whilst the rest of Ireland, Eire, declared itself a Republic with a separate constitution.

The cultural policy of the British nation-state discouraged minority languages in favour of English. However, the state encouraged national symbols reflecting a separate cultural identity e.g. the Union Jack is an amalgam of English, Scottish and Irish symbols. Each state had its own flag, anthem and song, separate regiments, and participated separately in international games.

15.2.2 Development of National Identity

Domestic and external development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to an expansion of national consciousness in Britain. This period is seen by many as a phase of fresh social tensions and new class formations. It saw the creation of a middle class socio-political identity, the emergence of British landed elite at the national level, and also the making of an English working class.

British wars during most of the period from 1756 to 1815 had a unifying impact on the British nation. Conscription and compulsory service served as a means of making the people aware of political and ideological demands of the nation-state and the tendency to regimentation as an aspect of industrial capitalism.

The loss of American colonies created a new interest in Wales and Scotland and in turn promoted internal tourism. The Revolutionary wars forced the British state to recruit the nation in an unprecedented manner. Adult males were involved from all parts of the Kingdom, e.g. one in four Scots of military age were serving in the British army. The impact of wars promoted the rapid development of communications. In England alone, the provincial press multiplied three times between 1750 and 1800. This in turn contributed to the preparation of town and national directories, political maps, English grammar books and dictionaries. In the late nineteenth century, leaders like Gladstone and Disraeli gained a national audience because of the increasing readership of newspapers and magazine. Parliamentary debates published in the dailies had a great influence on public opinion. Novel reading was particularly popular with the middle class and gradually became the national habit. Writers like G.B. Wells, Edgar Wallace, H.T. Buckle and numerous others brought the literary world of Britain together. The popular press, along with petition and platform became the three p's of British freedom, with a great impact on national life.

The rapid growth of population and urbanization not only led to local migration but also created a radically different age structure. By 1826 almost 60 per cent of the English population was under 24 years of age. This young British population was committed to nationalism and liberalism.

The expansion of the British Empire also generated a sense of national pride. Images of empire building— of colonial troops, military music by brass bands, of durbars and coronations of the British monarch attended by submissive maharajas in jewelled robes— were popularised through postcards and pictures. In schools, Empire Day was institutionalized in 1902 and text books focussed increasingly on the benefits of British rule for colonial peoples. It generated a sense of British superiority and a growing belief in the civilising mission of Empire. The concept of the 'white man's burden' enunciated a notion of racial superiority. The imperial government adopted policies which inscribed racism in the body politic and visibly in the public domain.

The manner in which industrialism affected state and politics was by conferring new wealth and power upon the growing middle class. While landowners were in general a bulwark of conservatism, the bourgeoisie were the prime-movers of change. Industrialization also created wage-earning classes of the factories, mills and mines. Confronted with their own weak bargaining power, labour looked to state for protection. They soon realized that governments responded to political pressure, they mobilized and demanded the right to vote (The Reform Act of 1832 aroused their aspirations and the Acts of 1867, 1884-85 and 1918 furthered the process of democratization). The working class agitations led by Robert Owen, William Lovett, and Francis Place brought out an awareness of the ills of industrial Britain. The radicals went further and propagated the principle of sovereignty of people against sovereignty of Parliament.

15.2.3 Spheres of State Intervention

The state's involvement in certain key economic spheres not only contributed to national integration but it also created the infrastructure for capitalist development. The railways transformed thinking about time and place. As Donald Read says, railways speeded up communication, both mental and physical. It gradually standardized time-keeping throughout the country, as 'railway time' became the

Greenwich time by the Act of 1880. The entire nation was connected by the transport network and through post-offices. The postal network also revolutionized the transmission of correspondence and news. The establishment of the National Telephone Company made communication faster and enabled direct conversations not only between government departments but also between service providers and consumers and facilitated closer ties between different regions.

Politically, advances towards representative government raised two quite distinct problems in politics— those of the ‘classes’ and of ‘the masses’, i.e. the upper and middle class elites and the poor. However, the social tensions within the British nation did not cause a class war invoking active support of the lower classes. Rather, class conflicts were accommodated within the institutions of political parties, pressure groups and trade unions. The state kept itself aloof from social conflicts by adopting neutrality, as in the case of the diffusion of Chartism in the 1840s. With the growth of democracy, a new conception of the state began to appear. It no longer acted as an instrument to put down the mass of the population in the interests of an outmoded society of landowners. The extension of the parliamentary franchise led to new forms of radicalism. Instead of an unrestricted individualism of **laissez-faire**, a new idea of welfare state emerged that the greatest freedom for every individual was possible only within the framework of a state representing and working for the ‘common good’ of all sections of society.

What was the exact relationship between the integrated and sophisticated British nation and the British state is not very clear. For thinkers like Jeremy Bentham, John Fielding and Patrick Colquhoun, a more united nation could also create a surveillance state. There are others who argue that greater national cohesion and uniformity were bound to strengthen the control and hegemony of Britain’s ruling elite. Every extension of the state’s activities, whether for the purpose of social welfare or national defence, raises a new the issue of the relationship between a powerful state and the individual citizen. However, the British nation-state has clearly demonstrated that a collective sense of responsibility representing the widest spectrum of society fosters a spirit of nationalism and strengthens the nation-state. The state has been actively involved in the work of economic and social justice to eliminate tensions in national life.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the main factors responsible for British national integration.

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- 2) What was the role of the British state in the process of national integration?

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15.3 FORMATION OF THE FRENCH NATION-STATE

As you have seen, while British nation-state formation was a slow and continuous process stretching over several centuries, French progress started from the sixteenth century but the revolutionary experience of 1789 was the precipitating factor. The nineteenth century saw a prolonged effort by the state to create an organic national unity which the Revolution proclaimed in theory. It was aided in this by various cultural and social processes which had been going on simultaneously along with urbanization and industrialization, widening literacy, economic integration, and the homogenization of separate cultural identities.

15.3.1 Origins of Centralized State Apparatus

The process of the centralization of state authority under absolute rulers began in the fifteenth century itself. The transition from medieval to absolute monarchy was speeded up by the different crises like the Hundred Years War, the religious wars and the Fronde uprisings. The essential institutional features of French absolutism could be seen in its standing army, a developed fiscal apparatus, a bureaucracy, specialized departments of state, and a body of salaried *intendants* (appointed royal officials) having sweeping administrative, financial and judicial powers. The vastly elaborated state structure in France curtailed the role of representative institutions, at both national and regional levels. The state did not seek collaboration with the Estates-General, the central representative assembly (no meetings of it took place between 1614 and 1789). Without a representative body, kings had the greatest difficulty in gathering support for their policies throughout the kingdom. State intervention in the economy went well beyond the needs of protective legislation as seen in Britain, while government's direction and participation in commercial and manufacturing activities remained very active. There was a total absence of alternative institutions through which opposition to the crown could be expressed. Although centralization of political authority had been achieved to a reasonable degree, France remained a political unit, and it was still not a fully developed nation at the beginning of the Revolution in 1789. In culture, family structure, social beliefs and economic activity, France was unusually diverse.

15.3.2 Rival Identities

France and Britain revealed significant contrasts as geographical units. France was the largest territorial state in pre-modern Europe in terms of total area and population. Though standing astride both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, France remained a continental power of great diversity with poor communications and transport. The wide gulf between urban and rural life and regional economic diversity between the north-east region and the rest of the country prevented France from becoming an economic unit till late nineteenth century. Till then it remained a patchwork of local and regional economies.

Official reports in France suggest that as late as the 1870s, standard French remained a foreign language for almost half the population who spoke their own languages such as Breton, Basque, Flemish and German. The French language gained ascendancy and became the national language only towards the end of the 19th century. Moreover, many of the culturally distinct regions had close links with

neighbouring states across the frontier. Language was far from being the only form of diversity. Not until 1891 was there an official standard time for the whole country.

15.3.3 Revolution and the Nation-State

The aspiration to form a nation-state was a product of the French Revolution. Political control by the absolutist state forged a sense of territorial identity but it did not foster a sense of nationhood. The French people were made 'subjects' but not 'citizens', inhabitants rather than builders of the nation. The events of the revolution turned them into political actors when the democratic movement against autocracy and privilege invoked the principle of sovereignty of the people. **The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen** and the suppression of 'orders' laid the foundations of French nationhood. **The Declaration of the Rights** stated: "The principle of all sovereignty lies essentially in the Nation".

A unified national state based on direct rule had replaced the superimposed state of *ancien regime*. It had a tremendous impact on spheres such as taxation, public works, justice, administrative measures, etc., all of which profoundly shaped the character of capitalist development in France in subsequent decades.

The Revolution set itself the task of national regeneration. As Lynn Hunt points out, the wholesale abandonment of the past generated a new symbolism, imagery and rhetoric and the concept of nationhood was central to this heroic enterprise. The new tricolour national flag replaced the regional ones. The spread of political culture through Paris and the regional press (papers like *Journal de Paris*, *Mercure*, the *Gazette*, Brissot's *Patriote francaise*, etc.) and the proliferation of political writings through the printed word involved large sections of the people in discussions about nationalism. Chenier's famous stage play, *Charles-IX*, in 1789 baptised the audience in the name of national law and constitution. The enactment of a series of plays like *Prise de la Bastille*, *Chene patriotique*, *Fete de la Liberte* celebrated the idea of nation and helped foster national consciousness. However, the Revolution could not resolve the national question completely. It was not till 1870 (when the Third Republic was established) that the principles of democratic legitimacy became a reality in the formal bourgeois sense. The pace of nation building remained slow. Even as late as the end of the nineteenth century a vast section of the rural population in remote areas were still unaware of and were yet to be incorporated into a national community.

The Napoleonic state effected a new parity between nation and state. The state was made a central integrating force to work for nationhood. Loyalty to the nation implied obedience to the state. The decisive reforms of 1789 such as the abolition of feudalism, equality before law, suppression of venal offices and hereditary posts, and freedom of enterprise, were all safeguarded. The legal codes promoted the principles of private property, family authority, and administrative centralization. The education system reflected social elitism based on merit an element of bourgeois ideology. Thus the policies of consolidation and modernization of the Napoleonic state laid the foundation for the emergence of a full-fledged bourgeois state which remained dominant till the late nineteenth century.

15.3.4 Making of Class Identities

Though economic and social modernization was taking place in several west European countries, what was specifically French is the important role of state and the ideological legacy of the Revolution in the development of class identities.

As far as bourgeois class identity is concerned, the real bourgeoisie of France which was actively involved in political matters, is not so clearly evident. It showed no identity distinct from the landed interest as is visible in Britain during the Anti-Corn Law league. What makes the French bourgeoisie different from those of other European countries was its close ties with the state. The stability of small business due to the slow transformation of French economy and almost stagnant population made the bourgeois elite occupy the highest political and bureaucratic posts after 1830. Its expansion and influence was bound with the expansion of the state. Thus, the French bourgeoisie consistently tried to serve and protect the interest of the state.

The peasant population of French cannot be termed as a class because peasant society was composed of communities, not merely geographical, but also cultural. What transformed them to some extent was the impact of policies and politics of the state. The best examples are the *grande peur* (The Great Fear) of 1789 and the Vendee and Chouan revolts of the 1790s. After February 1848, political events in Paris began to affect rural life, creating elements of class solidarity for the peasants through political mobilization. The imposition of a 45 per cent land tax surcharge was universally resisted and seen as an exploitation of peasants by the towns. Peasant turnout in April 1848 elections was exceptionally high. Peasant support for Louis Bonaparte and the mass politicization between 1849 and 1851 marked a significant step in the political formation of the peasantry. Further politicization in the 1870s and 1880s underlined the importance of peasant organizations though it did not create an independent class consciousness.

The long economic depression of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was a decisive period in the history of the French working class. Intense international competition in the manufacturing sector, declining prices, new technology and competitive methods, ruined big urban and handicraft industries, decimated the small textile and metal producers, and impoverished landowners and shopkeepers who formed various organizations to demand aid and protection from the state. It seems the French were unable to find an effective system of labour relation other than paternalism and authoritarianism. Proletarian class identity was created during this period through visible symbols and festivals. The banned red flag and the song *L' Internationale* marked off the workers' cause from that of the 'bourgeois' republic symbolized by the tricolour and *La Marseillaise* (The French national song). Annual rallies were held at the **Mur des Federes** from 1880. In 1879 a workers' congress of Marseilles openly adapted a combined programme of Marxists and Proudhonists. Workers' organizations were profoundly influenced by the attitude of the state. French workers involved the state in nearly 20 per cent of industrial disputes between 1895 and 1914.

The post-revolutionary state assumed the role of the regulator of society. It intervened in social and economic disputes. At a time when other major democratic states like Britain tended to withdraw from operations of civil society, France deliberately checked the development of autonomous institutions. Social conflicts

were therefore inevitably politicized because of state involvement and each social group tried to influence the state.

15.3.5 States and National Integration

From 1830 onwards, all the regimes in France were directly involved in the process of creating a unified nation. The state promoted integration by building a communication network far beyond the means or needs of immediate economic interests. Profit was subordinated to the national interest. The first trunk road system began under the old regime and was completed by the late 1840s. The trunk railway system was designed to strengthen state power whether through administrative communication or the movement of troops. But strategic communications alone could not create a nation. Laws were passed to regulate and subsidize local roads. The thick road network really made headway in the 1880s, creating all-weather roads. By the First World War, even remote areas could participate in economic networks on a national scale. The state was contributing directly towards economic integration of the nation.

The Banque de France (The French Bank) greatly multiplied its provincial branches. As a result, local stock exchange and commercial institutions began to grow. New towns and factories were becoming the melting pot of French society. The army also played an important role in nation building. Men from different regions were deliberately put together and invariably posted away from home. Regiments were kept on the march. Peasant soldiers were often amazed and proud to find unknown regions and customs on their journey to the front.

The French government organized grand festivals to instil a sense of unity and also to shape national memory. These included great Parisian fetes like the anniversary of the 1830 Revolution, the 14 July celebration begun by the Republic in 1880, the ceremonial 'Pantheonization' of Republican heroes (like Victor Hugo in 1885), the celebration of the centenary of the Revolution in 1889, and the Exhibitions of 1867, 1889 (when the Eiffel Tower in Paris was erected) and 1900. Such festivities, along with military bands, fireworks and street celebrations, were reproduced on a lesser scale in towns and villages throughout France.

The effects of economic and cultural integration were facilitated by a range of state and other institutions. Most important were the schools: whether state, church or private, they propagated the French language and patriotic values. The most popular of schools books, *Le Tour de La France par Deux Enfants* (1877) sold 6 million copies by 1901. It kindled patriotic feeling among the youth. The state also promoted the French language which became the language of the entire nation. It was the victory of the French nation-state over its diverse culture and separatist elements.

The French nation-state also grew through external threats. First it was the great victory of the citizens' army at Valmy during the French Revolution. National solidarity was generated by the German invasion in the First World War which forged unity against a common enemy. Later, the nationalism of the de Gaulle period saw an organised political movement around the state. General de Gaulle saw the need for a strong nation-state to maintain the autonomy of the country to protect it from the military threat of the Soviet Union and the economic and cultural challenge of the United States. Hence he championed not only strengthening military and economic power, but also advocated a strong

renovation of French culture against the twin danger of the ‘Anglicization’ of the French language and the global Americanization of culture.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss in 100 words the role of French Revolution in creating the French nation-state.

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- 2) What role did the French state play, both in the pre-Revolution and post-Revolution periods in forging a national identity?

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15.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have seen how the British and the French nation-states emerged. The process of centralization began in the sixteenth century in both the countries but in England the notion of national unity was more advanced and continuous while in France it remained only political unification till the coming of French Revolution. Political debates provided the theoretical structure of the French nation-state. The economic integration was carried out by the state in both countries. In Britain the building of nation-state was a continuous process and the economic integration was as much the product of state direction as of the activity of business groups and manufacturers.

The rise of the British nation-state was the result of the English union with Wales, Scotland and Ireland thereby creating a multi-national state. The initial problem of separate identities was greatly resolved by the process of capitalist development and economic growth. However, the French state had to promote and become a vehicle of capitalist development.

You have also seen that separate class identities emerged in Britain through representative institutions like parliament and political parties. In France class identities and class conflicts manifested in relation to the state and determined the nature of French nation-state which was also involved in social issues.

15.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-section 15.2.1
- 2) See Sub-section 15.2.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Sub-section 15.3.3
- 2) See Sub-section 15.3.1 and 15.3.5