Chapter 1: Challenges of Nation Building

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Which among the following statements about the Partition is incorrect? (a) Partition of India was the outcome of the "two-nation theory." (b) Punjab and Bengal were the two provinces divided on the basis of religion. (c) East Pakistan and West Pakistan were not contiguous. (d) The scheme of Partition included a plan for transfer of population across the border.

(d). The Partition scheme had no plan for transferring population; the chapter says no one had anticipated the scale of the problem or had any plans to handle it, and the migration happened abruptly amid violence.

Q2 Match the principles with the instances: (a) Mapping of boundaries on religious grounds; (b) Mapping of boundaries on grounds of different languages; (c) Demarcating boundaries within a country by geographical zones; (d) Demarcating boundaries within a country on administrative and political grounds. Instances: i. Pakistan and Bangladesh; ii. India and Pakistan; iii. Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh; iv. Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

(a)-ii: India and Pakistan were divided on religious grounds. (b)-i: Pakistan and Bangladesh separated on the basis of language. (c)-iv: Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are hill regions demarcated by geographical zone. (d)-iii: Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh were carved out within India on administrative and political grounds (regional culture and development imbalance).

Q3 Take a current political map of India (showing outlines of states) and mark the location of the following Princely States: (a) Junagadh, (b) Manipur, (c) Mysore, (d) Gwalior.

Locations on a present-day map: (a) Junagadh lies in Saurashtra, western Gujarat (it joined India after a plebiscite). (b) Manipur is in the far north-east, on the border with Myanmar (it signed a Merger Agreement in September 1949). (c) Mysore is in southern Karnataka. (d) Gwalior is in the northern part of Madhya Pradesh. Mark each of these four places on the outline map.

Q4 Bismay: "The merger with the Indian State was an extension of democracy to the people of the Princely States." Inderpreet: "I am not so sure, there was force being used. Democracy comes by creating consensus." What is your own opinion in the light of accession of Princely States and the responses of the people in these parts?

Both views hold some truth, but on balance the merger extended democracy. In favour of Bismay: most princely states were run non-democratically and rulers were unwilling to grant rights, while the people of most states clearly wanted to join India. Junagadh joined after a plebiscite, and Manipur held the first election on universal adult franchise in June 1948. In Hyderabad, people's movements against the Nizam, especially in Telangana, pushed for change. In favour of Inderpreet: force was used in Hyderabad, where the army moved in September 1948 after the Nizam's razakars unleashed atrocities, and Manipur's merger in 1949 followed sharp differences in its Assembly. Still, most states acceded peacefully through the Instrument of Accession, negotiated by Patel with skill and flexibility. So the process was largely consensual, with limited force in a few cases, and it opened democratic rights to people of the states.

Q5 Read the following statements made in August 1947: "Today you have worn on your heads a crown of thorns. The seat of power is a nasty thing. You have to remain ever wakeful on that seat... you have to be more humble and forbearing... now there will be no end to your being tested." - M.K. Gandhi. "...India will awake to a life of freedom... we step out from the old to the new... we end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate today is but a step, an opening of opportunity..." - Jawaharlal Nehru. Spell out the agenda of nation building that flows from these two statements. Which one appeals more to you and why?

Gandhi's statement points to an agenda of responsible, humble use of power: those who govern must stay vigilant, tolerant and accountable, keep serving the poor and disadvantaged, and keep communal harmony, since power is a test, not a prize. Nehru's statement points to a forward-looking agenda: leaving behind colonial misfortune, treating independence as only the beginning, and using the opportunity to build a free, united, democratic India with development and well-being for all. Together they imply three tasks: a united nation accommodating diversity, a working democracy, and development with equality. Personal choice: Gandhi's statement may appeal more because it warns that power brings duties and constant testing, which keeps rulers honest. A student may equally prefer Nehru's, for its optimism and call to turn freedom into opportunity. Either answer is acceptable if justified.

Q6 What are the reasons being used by Nehru for keeping India secular? Do you think these reasons were only ethical and sentimental? Or were there some prudential reasons as well?

In his letter of 15 October 1947, Nehru noted that India had a Muslim minority so large that it could not go anywhere else, whatever the provocation from Pakistan. He insisted it must be treated in a civilised manner, with security and the rights of citizens in a democratic State. The reasons were not only ethical and sentimental. There were prudential reasons too: failing to do so would create a festering sore that would eventually poison the whole body politic and perhaps destroy it. Muslims were still 10-12 per cent of the population in 1951, so discrimination would breed lasting conflict and threaten unity. Besides, the national movement's leaders rejected the two-nation theory and held that all citizens were equal irrespective of religion. Secularism was thus both a principle of justice and a practical necessity for stability and national unity.

Q7 Bring out two major differences between the challenge of nation building for eastern and western regions of the country at the time of Independence.

1. Nature of Partition: In the west, Punjab was divided on religious lines, producing abrupt, massive two-way migration and violence between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims within a short span. In the east, Bengal was also divided, but the east (East Pakistan, later Bangladesh) was cut off from West Pakistan by a long stretch of Indian territory, and the trauma and movement of refugees there were spread over a longer period. 2. Integration and reorganisation: In the west, the challenge was settling refugees and integrating many small princely states, such as Saurashtra's 14 big and 119 small states. In the north-east, the task centred on integrating states such as Manipur, which had its own election and Assembly, and on later carving out states like Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh.

Q8 What was the task of the States Reorganisation Commission? What was its most salient recommendation?

The Central Government appointed the States Reorganisation Commission in 1953, after the formation of Andhra state spurred demands elsewhere, to look into the question of redrawing the boundaries of the states. Its most salient recommendation was that the boundaries of states should reflect the boundaries of different languages, that is, states should be organised on a linguistic basis. On the basis of its report, the States Reorganisation Act was passed in 1956, creating 14 states and six union territories.

Q9 It is said that the nation is to a large extent an "imagined community" held together by common beliefs, history, political aspirations and imaginations. Identify the features that make India a nation.

India is held together as a nation by several shared features. First, a common history: the shared experience of colonial rule and the national movement, which agreed on democratic government and the welfare of the poor and disadvantaged. Second, common political aspirations and destiny, expressed in the Constitution, with its fundamental rights, universal adult franchise, parliamentary democracy, equality and the Directive Principles. Third, a commitment to secularism, treating all citizens equally irrespective of religion. Fourth, unity in diversity: India accommodates many languages, cultures and religions, and the choice of linguistic states showed that recognising regional identities strengthens, not weakens, national unity. Fifth, territorial integration achieved through the Instrument of Accession and the merger of princely states. Finally, a shared acceptance of plurality in democratic politics.

Q10 Read the passage by Ramachandra Guha: "In the history of nation-building only the Soviet experiment bears comparison with the Indian. There too, a sense of unity had to be forged between many diverse ethnic groups, religious, linguistic communities and social classes. The scale - geographic as well as demographic - was comparably massive. The raw material the state had to work with was equally unpropitious: a people divided by faith and driven by debt and disease." (a) List the commonalities that the author mentions between India and Soviet Union and give one example for each of these from India. (b) The author does not talk about dissimilarities between the two experiments. Can you mention two dissimilarities? (c) In retrospect which of these two experiments worked better and why?

(a) Commonalities: (1) Diverse ethnic groups, religious and linguistic communities: India had Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others, and speakers of many languages such as Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi and Punjabi. (2) Social classes needing unity: India's poor and socially disadvantaged groups had to be brought into the nation, as the Constitution's equality and special protection show. (3) Massive geographic and demographic scale: India was of continental size, with 565 princely states to integrate. (4) Unpromising raw material, a people divided by faith and driven by debt and disease: Partition divided people by religion and uprooted about 80 lakh migrants, who lived in refugee camps. (b) Dissimilarities: India chose a democratic, multi-party, parliamentary path with elections and fundamental rights, whereas the Soviet Union was a one-party communist state; India built a federal structure of linguistic states by accommodation, whereas the Soviet republics were held together under centralised party control. (c) In retrospect India's experiment worked better: India has remained united and has sustained democracy, and accepting linguistic diversity strengthened national unity, whereas the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991.