Chapter 2: Era of One-Party Dominance

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Choose the correct option to fill in the blanks.
(a) The First General Elections in 1952 involved simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and ……(The President of India/ State Assemblies/ Rajya Sabha/ The Prime Minister)
(b) The party that won the second largest number of Lok Sabha seats in the first elections was the……(Praja Socialist Party/ Bharatiya Jana Sangh/ Communist Party of India/Bharatiya Janata Party)
(c) One of the guiding principles of the ideology of the Swatantra Party was……(Working class interests/ protection of Princely States / economy free from State control / Autonomy of States within the Union)

(a) State Assemblies. (b) Communist Party of India (it won 16 seats, next to the Congress's 364 of 489). (c) Economy free from State control.

Q2 Match the following leaders listed in List A with the parties in List B.
List A: (a) S. A. Dange (b) Shyama Prasad Mukherjee (c) Minoo Masani (d) Asoka Mehta
List B: i. Bharatiya Jana Sangh ii. Swatantra Party iii. Praja Socialist Party iv. Communist Party of India

(a) S. A. Dange - iv. Communist Party of India
(b) Shyama Prasad Mukherjee - i. Bharatiya Jana Sangh
(c) Minoo Masani - ii. Swatantra Party
(d) Asoka Mehta - iii. Praja Socialist Party

Q3 Four statements regarding one-party dominance are given below. Mark each of them as true or false.
(a) One-party dominance is rooted in the absence of strong alternative political parties.
(b) One-party dominance occurs because of weak public opinion.
(c) One-party dominance is linked to the nation's colonial past.
(d) One-party dominance reflects the absence of democratic ideals in a country.

All four are false.
(a) False: India had many diverse, vibrant opposition parties even in the 1950s. Congress won mainly because it inherited the freedom-struggle legacy, had a countrywide organisation, and the first-past-the-post system turned divided opposition votes into Congress seats.
(b) False: voters took part freely in competitive elections; their choice, not weak opinion, produced Congress wins.
(c) False: the dominance came from the national movement's legacy, not colonial rule as such.
(d) False: Congress dominance happened under free and fair democratic conditions, unlike one-party states such as China or Cuba.

Q4 Take a political map of India (with State outlines) and mark:
(a) two states where Congress was not in power at some point during 1952-67.
(b) two states where the Congress remained in power through this period.

This is a map exercise; the points to mark are below.
(a) Kerala: a CPI-led coalition under E.M.S. Namboodiripad governed from 1957 until dismissed in 1959 under Article 356. Also mark Madras (or Orissa / Travancore-Cochin), where the Congress failed to win a majority in 1952 and formed the government only afterwards.
(b) Mark two states where the Congress held power throughout, such as Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The chapter says the Congress controlled the national and all state governments except exceptions like Kerala; check the electoral map in the chapter to confirm your choice.

Q5 Read the following passage and answer the questions below:
"Patel, the organisational man of the Congress, wanted to purge the Congress of other political groups and sought to make of it a cohesive and disciplined political party. He .... sought to take the Congress away from its all-embracing character and turn it into a close-knit party of disciplined cadres. Being a 'realist' he looked more for discipline than for comprehension. While Gandhi took too romantic a view of "carrying on the movement," Patel's idea of transforming the Congress into strictly political party with a single ideology and tight discipline showed an equal lack of understanding of the eclectic role that the Congress, as a government, was to be called upon to perform in the decades to follow." - Rajni Kothari
(a) Why does the author think that Congress should not have been a cohesive and disciplined party?
(b) Give some examples of the eclectic role of the Congress party in the early years.
(c) Why does the author say that Gandhi's view about Congress' future was romantic?

(a) Kothari argues that the Congress, once in government, had to play an eclectic, all-inclusive role. A single-ideology, tightly disciplined cadre party would have shut out groups whose interests differed. The Congress's strength lay in being a broad coalition that accommodated diverse classes, castes, religions and ideologies, tolerated factions, and avoided extreme positions. Rigid discipline would have destroyed this inclusiveness and pushed groups out to become opposition.
(b) The Congress was a social and ideological coalition: peasants and industrialists, urban and rural people, workers and owners, and upper, middle and lower classes and castes all found space in it. It held revolutionaries and pacifists, conservatives and radicals, extremists and moderates, and right, left and centre. Factions flourished inside it, and political competition took place within the party, so it acted as both ruling party and opposition (the 'Congress system'). It also absorbed the opposition's ideas, as in 1955 when it declared the socialist pattern of society as its goal.
(c) Kothari calls Gandhi's idea of 'carrying on the movement' romantic because it ignored the practical needs of governing. Once freedom came, the Congress had to function as a government and political party in competitive elections, not just continue as a movement. Gandhi's view, like Patel's, did not grasp this changed role.