Chapter 7: Regional Aspirations

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Match the following. A (Nature of regional aspirations): (a) Socio-religious identity leading to statehood; (b) Linguistic identity and tensions with Centre; (c) Regional imbalance leading to demand for Statehood; (d) Secessionist demands on account of tribal identity. B (States): i. Nagaland/Mizoram; ii. Jharkhand/Chhattisgarh; iii. Punjab; iv. Tamil Nadu.

(a) - iii (Punjab: the Akali Dal's Sikh-identity-based demand for a Punjabi suba, achieved in 1966). (b) - iv (Tamil Nadu: Dravidian movement, anti-Hindi agitation and friction with the Centre over language). (c) - ii (Jharkhand/Chhattisgarh: backwardness and regional imbalance fuelled demands for separate statehood). (d) - i (Nagaland/Mizoram: tribal groups demanded separation from India).

Q2 Regional aspirations of the people of North-East get expressed in different ways. These include movements against outsiders, movement for greater autonomy and movement for separate national existence. On the map of the North-East, using different shades for these three, show the States where these expressions are prominently found.

A map cannot be drawn here, so the shading key is given for the outline map of the North-East. Shade 1, movements against outsiders: Assam (the Assam Movement of 1979-85 led by AASU), Tripura (original inhabitants reduced to a minority) and Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (hostility to Chakma refugees). Shade 2, demands for greater autonomy: Assam, where the Bodos, Karbis and Dimasas sought separate States or autonomy (District Councils for Karbis and Dimasas, an Autonomous Council for Bodos), plus the hill and tribal areas that were carved out of Assam as Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh, with Manipur and Tripura upgraded to States. Shade 3, movements for separate national existence: Mizoram (MNF under Laldenga, settled by the 1986 accord) and Nagaland (Phizo and the Naga National Council, still unresolved). Assam appears in more than one shade because it saw several kinds of movement.

Q3 What were the main provisions of the Punjab accord? In what way can they be the basis for further tensions between the Punjab and its neighbouring States?

The Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal (Punjab) Accord of July 1985 provided that: (i) Chandigarh would be transferred to Punjab; (ii) a separate commission would settle the border dispute between Punjab and Haryana; (iii) a tribunal would decide the sharing of Ravi-Beas river water among Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan; (iv) those affected by militancy would receive compensation and better treatment; and (v) the Armed Forces Special Powers Act would be withdrawn from Punjab. These provisions touch matters on which neighbouring States have competing claims. Chandigarh is the capital of both Punjab and Haryana, so its transfer to Punjab alone can upset Haryana. The border commission could pass territory between Punjab and Haryana, and a river-water award that favours one State leaves Haryana and Rajasthan feeling shortchanged. Each of these issues can therefore breed fresh inter-State disputes.

Q4 Why did the Anandpur Sahib Resolution become controversial?

The Anandpur Sahib Resolution was passed by the Akalis at their 1973 conference. It asserted regional autonomy and sought to redefine Centre-State relations, which was really a plea for stronger federalism. But it also spoke of the aspirations of the Sikh qaum (community or nation) and declared the goal of attaining the bolbala (dominance) of the Sikhs. That language made it controversial. Critics read it as a demand for a Sikh-dominated, autonomous or even separate entity, which threatened national unity, and non-Sikhs, especially Hindus, felt excluded. The resolution had limited appeal among the Sikh masses at first. After the Akali government was dismissed in 1980, the Akali Dal took up issues such as water-sharing, and religious leaders raised the question of an autonomous Sikh identity. Leadership then passed to extremists, and the demands fed into militancy.

Q5 Explain the internal divisions of the State of Jammu and Kashmir and describe how these lead to multiple regional aspirations in that State.

Jammu and Kashmir comprises three social and political regions. Jammu is a mix of foothills and plains, mainly Hindu, with Muslims, Sikhs and others. Kashmir (chiefly the valley) is mostly Kashmiri Muslim, with Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and others. Ladakh is mountainous and thinly populated, with the population almost equally divided between Buddhists and Muslims. Because of these religious, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and tribal differences, the regions hold different political and developmental aspirations. Within the Kashmir valley, the strongest sentiments have been for Kashmiriyat, a Kashmiri identity above religion, and for autonomy or a separate Kashmiri nation. Some outside the State wanted full integration into India, while Kashmiris had grievances over the plebiscite promise, erosion of autonomy and weak democracy. Jammu and Ladakh have their own distinct concerns and expectations of development. So no single aspiration speaks for the whole State.

Q6 What are the various positions on the issue of regional autonomy for Kashmir? Which of these do you think are justifiable? Give reasons for your answer.

Two broad positions existed on the special status under Article 370. First, many people outside J&K felt that Article 370 prevented the State's full integration with India and should be revoked so that J&K is treated like any other State. Second, many Kashmiris felt the autonomy under Article 370 was not enough. They had three major grievances: the promise to refer Accession to the people once the tribal-invasion situation normalised was never fulfilled, which created the demand for a plebiscite; the special federal status had been eroded in practice, hence the demand for restoration of autonomy or 'Greater State Autonomy'; and democracy, as practised in the rest of India, had not been institutionalised in J&K. Model view: the grievances about democratic institutions and free, fair elections are the most justifiable, since the chapter records rigged elections and the dismissal of elected governments. Integration with the Union is also reasonable, but it should come through the consent of the people and through democratic and constitutional processes rather than force. A plebiscite or separation would run against the Indian approach of accommodating diversity within the Union. Note that Article 370 was abrogated in August 2019 and the State was reorganised into two Union Territories, J&K and Ladakh.

Q7 The Assam movement was a combination of cultural pride and economic backwardness. Explain.

The Assam Movement (1979-85), led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), had both cultural and economic roots. Culturally, the Assamese suspected that huge numbers of illegal Bengali Muslim settlers from Bangladesh had entered the State, and feared that unless these foreigners were detected and deported, the indigenous Assamese would be reduced to a minority. The movement opposed the domination of Bengalis and other outsiders and a voters' register that included lakhs of immigrants. Economically, Assam suffered widespread poverty and unemployment despite natural resources such as oil, tea and coal. These resources were felt to be drained out of the State without commensurate benefit to its people. The movement demanded that outsiders who entered after 1951 be sent back, and it tried to blockade trains and oil supply to refineries in Bihar. It ended with the 1985 Assam Accord, which provided for identifying and deporting foreigners who came during and after the Bangladesh war. The AASU then formed the Asom Gana Parishad, which came to power in 1985 promising to build a 'Golden Assam'.

Q8 All regional movements need not lead to separatist demands. Explain by giving examples from this chapter.

Regional aspirations are a normal part of democratic politics, and most of them are expressed within the constitutional framework, not as secession. Examples from the chapter: (i) The Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu began with some ambitions of a Dravida nation but did not take up arms. It used public debates and elections, won power in 1967, and became influential nationally, showing that regionalism and nationalism are compatible. (ii) Linguistic reorganisation resolved demands for Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat by redrawing State boundaries, and the Punjabi suba led to Punjab and Haryana in 1966. Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand were also created. (iii) Tribal demands in the North-East, such as those of the Karbis, Dimasas and Bodos, were met through District Councils and an Autonomous Council within Assam. (iv) Even the Mizo secessionist movement ended in the 1986 accord and statehood. Thus India's flexible, accommodative framework keeps regional aspirations from turning separatist.

Q9 Regional demands from different parts of India exemplify the principle of unity with diversity. Do you agree? Give reasons.

Yes, broadly. The Indian approach holds that the nation will not deny the rights of regions and linguistic groups to keep their own culture, so the nation does not negate the region. Unlike many European countries that saw cultural diversity as a threat, India lets democracy express regional aspirations and does not treat them as anti-national. Regional demands for linguistic States, statehood, autonomy and protection of identity have mostly been accommodated by redrawing internal boundaries, special provisions, the Sixth Schedule, District and Autonomous Councils, and negotiated accords (Mizoram 1986, Assam 1985, Punjab 1985). Tamil Nadu shows regional pride coexisting with Indian nationalism. Lessons from the chapter: regional aspirations are part of democracy, they are best met by negotiation and power sharing, and regional imbalances should be addressed. Where this was not done, as in Kashmir, Nagaland and Punjab, conflict and violence followed. Qualification: balancing unity and diversity is an ongoing task, since some issues remain unresolved.

Q10 Read the passage and answer the questions below: One of Hazarika's songs dwells on the unity theme; the seven states of north-eastern India become seven sisters born of the same mother. 'Meghalaya went own way..., Arunachal too separated and Mizoram appeared in Assam's gateway as a groom to marry another daughter.' The song ends with a determination to keep the unity of the Assamese with other smaller nationalities that are left in the present-day Assam - 'the Karbis and the Missing brothers and sisters are our dear ones.' (a) Which unity is the poet talking about? (b) Why were some States of North-East created separately out of the erstwhile State of Assam? (c) Do you think that the same theme of unity could apply to all the regions of India? Why?

(a) The poet speaks of the unity of the North-East: the seven States, the 'seven sisters', are children of one mother, and the Assamese remain united in affection with the smaller communities still within Assam, such as the Karbis and the Missing. (b) At independence nearly the whole region (except Manipur and Tripura) was Assam. Non-Assamese groups felt the Assam government was imposing the Assamese language on them, and tribal leaders wanted separate tribal States. Since the demands could not be met inside Assam, the Centre created Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh out of it, and Tripura and Manipur were also made States. (c) Yes, in principle. India is a union of many regions, languages and cultures, and the Indian approach is to balance unity and diversity: regions together form the nation and are partners in its destiny, so differences need not break unity. The theme works where regions get power sharing, respect for their identity and attention to development. Where they feel neglected, as the chapter's Kashmir and Nagaland cases show, unity needs conscious accommodation and dialogue.