Chapter 5: India, That is Bharat

Questions — Questions, Activities and Projects

Q1 Discuss what could be the meaning of the quotation at the start of the chapter.

SOLUTION

The quotation is by Sri Aurobindo: 'In India at a very early time the spiritual and cultural unity was made complete and became the very stuff of the life of all this great surge of humanity between the Himalayas and the two seas.'

It means that, long ago, the people living in the Indian Subcontinent — between the Himalayas in the north and the seas on the east and west — were bound together by a shared spiritual and cultural life.

Even though India had many different regions and names, this inner unity ran through all its people and became part of their everyday existence.

Sri Aurobindo is saying that India's unity is very ancient and goes beyond political boundaries.

Answer: India's people, from the Himalayas to the seas, were united by a deep spiritual and cultural bond from very early times, making this unity central to their way of life.

Q2 True or false?

(a) The Rig Veda describes the entire geography of India.

(b) The Vishnu Purana describes the entire Subcontinent.

(c) In Ashoka's time, 'Jambudvipa' included what is today India, parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

(d) The Mahabharata lists many regions, including Kashmir, Kutch, and Kerala.

(e) The term 'Hindustan' first appeared in a Greek inscription more than 2,000 years ago.

(f) In ancient Persian, the word 'Hindu' refers to the Hindu religion.

(g) 'Bharata' is a name given to India by foreign travellers.

SOLUTION

(a) False. The Rig Veda names only the northwest region of the Subcontinent — 'Sapta Sindhava' (land of the seven rivers). It does not describe the entire geography.

(b) True. The Vishnu Purana defines Bharata as 'the country that lies north of the

ocean and south of the snowy mountains' — a description that covers the whole Subcontinent.

(c) True. Ashoka (around 250 BCE) used the name 'Jambudvipa' for the whole of India, which at that time included what is today Bangladesh, Pakistan, and parts of Afghanistan.

(d) True. The Mahabharata lists many regions — Kashmira (Kashmir), Kurukshetra (Haryana), Vanga (Bengal), Kaccha (Kutch), Kerala, and many more, covering the entire Subcontinent.

(e) False. 'Hindustan' first appeared in a Persian inscription (not Greek), and it was about 1,800 years ago (not more than 2,000 years ago).

(f) False. In ancient Persian, 'Hindu' is a purely geographical term referring to the region of the Indus River (Sindhu). It does not refer to the Hindu religion.

(g) False. 'Bharata' (Bharatavarsha) is a name given by the ancient inhabitants of India themselves, first appearing in texts like the Rig Veda and Mahabharata — not by foreign travellers.

Answer: (a) False (b) True (c) True (d) True (e) False — it was a Persian inscription, ~1,800 years ago (f) False — it is a geographical term (g) False — it is a name given by Indians, not foreigners.

Q3 If you were born some 2,000 years ago and had the chance to name our country, what name or names might you have chosen, and why? Use your imagination!

SOLUTION

This is an open-ended question — your answer may differ. Here is a model answer based on the chapter's discussion of naming:

2,000 years ago I might have chosen 'Jambudvipa' — the name Ashoka himself used around 250 BCE.

Reason: The jamun (jambul) tree was native to the land and familiar to everyone from the northwest to the south. Naming the country after such a common, beloved tree would feel natural and unifying.

Alternatively, I might have chosen 'Bharatavarsha' — 'the country of the Bharatas' — because by that time it was already used in the Mahabharata and described the whole Subcontinent from the Himalayas to the seas.

The chapter shows that both names were used around 2,000 years ago, so either

would be a well-reasoned choice. What matters is giving a reason connected to geography, nature, or the people of the land.

Answer: Model answer: 'Jambudvipa' (after the native jamun tree, a symbol familiar across the Subcontinent) or 'Bharatavarsha' (already used in the Mahabharata to describe the whole land). Answers vary — any name grounded in geography, nature, or the people of the land is valid.

Q4 Why did people travel to India from various parts of the world in ancient times? What could be their motivations in undertaking such long journeys?

SOLUTION

The chapter mentions several reasons why people came to India from other parts of the world:

1. Military campaigns: Persian emperors sent armies to gain control of the region of the Indus River.
2. Religion and pilgrimage: Scholars and pilgrims came to India for its religious and spiritual traditions. Xuanzang, the Chinese traveller, visited India in the 7th century CE to collect Buddhist texts and meet scholars.
3. Scholarly exchange: Xuanzang and other Chinese scholars came to learn from Indian knowledge traditions and translate manuscripts.
4. Trade: India was a land of great resources and goods, making trade a likely motivation for many ancient travellers.
5. India's reputation: The Chinese word 'Tianzhu' (another name for India) could mean 'heavenly master', reflecting the respect for India as the land of the Buddha — drawing people for spiritual reasons.

Answer: People travelled to India for military campaigns (Persians), religious pilgrimage and collecting Buddhist texts (Chinese scholars like Xuanzang), scholarly exchange, and trade. India's fame as a land of wisdom and resources drew visitors from near and far.