Chapter 14: India and Her Neighbours

Questions — Questions and Activities

Q1 Explain who a maritime neighbour is with two examples with respect to India.

SOLUTION

A maritime neighbour is a country connected to another by a shared sea or ocean, even without a direct land border. The ocean acts as a vital link, facilitating centuries of trade, cultural exchange, and historical ties.

Two examples of India's maritime neighbours:

1. Sri Lanka — an island nation located to the southeast of India, separated by the Palk Strait. At its nearest point, the distance between the two countries is only about 32 km, making it India's closest maritime neighbour.

2. The Maldives — a nation of over 1,100 islets located only about 130 km from Minicoy (part of India's Union Territory of Lakshadweep), making it an important maritime neighbour for trade and security in the Indian Ocean.

Other maritime neighbours mentioned in the chapter include Iran, Oman, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia.

Answer: A maritime neighbour is a country connected by a shared sea or ocean, not necessarily a land border. India's maritime neighbours include Sri Lanka (across the Palk Strait, ~32 km away at the nearest point) and the Maldives (~130 km from Minicoy island).

Q2 How has Buddhism created links with India's neighbours? Give examples to explain your answer.

SOLUTION

Buddhism, which originated in India, has been one of the most powerful forces connecting India with her neighbours through spiritual, cultural, and intellectual ties.

Examples from the chapter:

1. China — Buddhism reached China around the 1st century CE via trade and pilgrimage routes. Chinese monks like Faxian and Xuanzang travelled to Indian centres of learning, while Indian monks such as Bodhidharma, Dharmakshema, and Kumarajiva carried Buddhist teachings to China.

2. Bhutan — Guru Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), an Indian Buddhist master, introduced the Vajrayana school of Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century CE. This remains central to Bhutan's religious identity. Bhutanese pilgrims frequently visit sacred Buddhist sites in India such as Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, and Nalanda.

3. Sri Lanka — Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 3rd century BCE by Mahendra and Sanghamitra, the son and daughter of Emperor Ashoka.

4. Myanmar — India helped restore the Ananda temple in Bagan and gifted a replica of the Sarnath statue of the Buddha to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.

5. Afghanistan — Before the spread of Islam, Afghanistan was a thriving centre of Buddhist culture. The gigantic Buddhas of Bamiyan reflected the deep civilisational ties through Mahayana Buddhism.

6. Thailand and Indonesia — Theravada Buddhism is widely practised in Thailand; the Borobudur Stupa in Indonesia is the world's largest Buddhist monument.

Three main schools — Mahayana, Vajrayana, and Theravada — all originated in India and spread to different neighbours.

Answer: Buddhism, originating in India, spread to China (1st century CE via monks like Faxian and missionaries like Bodhidharma), Sri Lanka (3rd century BCE by Mahendra and Sanghamitra under Ashoka), Bhutan (Vajrayana by Guru Padmasambhava, 8th century CE), Myanmar, Thailand (Theravada), and Indonesia (Borobudur Stupa). This created deep spiritual and cultural links across the neighbourhood.

Q3 What does 'open border' policy mean? How does the India–Nepal 'open border' policy affect the lives of people living along the border?

SOLUTION

An open border policy means that people from two countries can travel across the border without a visa or passport.

The India–Nepal relationship is governed by the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which provides for open borders, free movement of people and goods, and cooperation in areas such as defence and foreign policy.

Effects on people living along the India–Nepal border:

1. Freedom of movement — Citizens from both sides can cross freely without

passports or visas, enabling people to access education, healthcare, and employment in either country.

2. Family connections — People with families on both sides can maintain those connections easily.

3. Trade and livelihoods — Daily life in many border towns reflects close interdependence, with vibrant markets and thriving trade.

4. Economic integration — India is Nepal's largest trading partner, supplying petroleum, medicines, food items, and manufactured products. Nepal exports agricultural produce, handicrafts, and garments.

India and Nepal work together to ensure the open border remains safe and is not misused; it is described as a symbol of trust and friendship between the two countries.

Answer: An 'open border' means people can cross between two countries without a visa or passport. The India–Nepal open border (under the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship) allows border residents to freely access education, healthcare, employment, and family across the border, supports vibrant cross-border trade, and reinforces social and economic integration of border communities.

Q4 The chapter says, "Being neighbours is not just about geography." Explain this statement with an example.

SOLUTION

The chapter conveys that true neighbourly relations are built on shared history, culture, religion, trade, language, and cooperation — not just a shared land border.

Example 1 — India and Afghanistan: Although Pakistan now separates them geographically, India and Afghanistan have maintained close ties rooted in shared history (Uttarapatha trade route, Buddhism) and India's support for Afghan infrastructure — the Afghan Parliament building and the Zaranj-Delaram highway. This shows that cultural and historical bonds persist even when geography becomes complicated.

Example 2 — India and Sri Lanka: Despite not sharing a land border, India and Sri Lanka have been close neighbours for centuries through Buddhism, cultural ties, and economic cooperation.

The chapter also introduces the idea of 'regionalism' — working together for the benefit of everyone in the region, creating peace, stability, and shared progress. This confirms that being a good neighbour means sharing values, history, and working together, not merely sharing a boundary.

Answer: Neighbourhood is built on shared culture, history, trade, and cooperation, not just geography. For example, India and Afghanistan no longer share a direct land border, yet they maintain close ties rooted in their ancient civilisational connection (Uttarapatha trade route, Buddhism) and India's support for Afghan infrastructure — showing that bonds of history and culture define a neighbourhood as much as physical proximity.

Q5 What are the different ways in which India has helped smaller countries in her neighbourhood? Explain with examples.

SOLUTION

The chapter describes several ways in which India has helped smaller neighbouring countries:

1. Disaster relief — India responded quickly during the 2004 tsunami (helping the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and others), the 2014 water crisis in Male, and the COVID-19 pandemic, reinforcing India's role as the region's 'trusted first responder'.

2. Infrastructure development — India helped build the Afghan Parliament building and the Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan. India also helped develop Iran's Chabahar Port, giving better access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

3. Energy cooperation — India supported the construction of hydroelectric power plants in Bhutan (such as the Tala Hydroelectric Project), contributing to Bhutan's economic growth and supplying renewable energy to India.

4. Cultural heritage preservation — India helped restore the Ananda temple in Bagan, Myanmar, and gifted a 16-foot replica of the Sarnath statue of the Buddha to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon.

5. Early warning systems — After the 2004 tsunami, India joined hands with Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other Indian Ocean countries to set up a network of sensors, satellites, and communication links. The Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre in Hyderabad alerts neighbouring countries.

6. Trade and economic support — India is Nepal's largest trading partner, supplying essential goods like petroleum, medicines, food items, and manufactured products.

Answer: India has helped smaller neighbours through: disaster relief (2004 tsunami, 2014 Maldives water crisis, COVID-19); infrastructure support (Afghan Parliament, Zaranj-Delaram highway, Iran's Chabahar Port); energy cooperation (Bhutan's Tala Hydroelectric Project); cultural heritage restoration (Ananda temple, Myanmar); tsunami early-warning network with Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand; and as Nepal's largest trade partner supplying essential goods.

Q6 How do shared challenges become opportunities for cooperation? Were there examples in this chapter to illustrate this?

SOLUTION

Shared challenges force neighbouring countries to work together, turning problems into platforms for regional cooperation and trust-building.

Examples from the chapter:

1. The 2004 Tsunami — The earthquake-triggered tsunami killed more than 200,000 people across the region, including about 15,000 in India. This shared disaster led India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other Indian Ocean countries to jointly set up the Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre in Hyderabad, which now alerts neighbouring countries — turning a tragedy into lasting regional cooperation.

2. Climate change — Bangladesh and the Maldives both face threats from rising sea levels. The Maldives joined India's International Solar Alliance to share research and technology on solar energy, reflecting joint action against a common threat.

3. Maritime security — India and Indonesia share large coastlines and common concerns about piracy, climate change, and protection of sea lanes, leading to growing strategic cooperation.

4. The Sundarban National Park — A shared natural space between India and Bangladesh, whose protection and management are coordinated jointly by the two neighbours.

Answer: Shared challenges build cooperation. The 2004 tsunami led India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand to jointly establish the Indian Tsunami Early Warning Centre in Hyderabad. Climate change threats led the Maldives to join India's International Solar Alliance. Maritime security concerns deepened India–Indonesia cooperation. The Sundarban is jointly managed by India and Bangladesh.

Q7 If borders were drawn only by culture and connections, how would the map look different?

SOLUTION

If borders were drawn by culture and connections rather than by political and historical events, the map would look very different from today's political map.

1. India, Nepal, and Bhutan share Hindu and Buddhist traditions, open-border practices, and centuries of shared festivals (Dashain/Dashahra, Tihar/Diwali, Holi) — their borders might appear softer or overlapping.

2. Bangladesh and India would be closely linked, sharing the Bangla language, the Sundarban ecosystem, transboundary river systems, and a common history — the cultural border between them would be almost invisible in many areas.

3. Afghanistan and India, though now separated by Pakistan, share ancient trade routes (Uttarapatha), Buddhist heritage (Bamiyan Buddhas, Gandhara), and civilisational connections.

4. Southeast Asia — Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia — would be closely grouped with India in a 'cultural neighbourhood' given shared Buddhist and Hindu heritage (Ramayana, Sanskrit names, Brahmi script), maritime trade networks, and Indian-origin communities.

5. Oman and India's western coast would be linked by 5,000 years of trade (going back to the Harappan period).

The chapter's central idea is that culture, trade, and shared history created networks crossing modern political borders. A 'cultural map' would show India at the centre of an interconnected web stretching across South, Southeast, and West Asia.

Answer: A culture-based map would blur many political borders: India, Nepal, and Bhutan would form an interconnected Hindu-Buddhist zone; Bangladesh and India's eastern states would merge through shared language and rivers; Afghanistan and India would be culturally linked via the Uttarapatha and Buddhist heritage; Southeast Asia (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore) would form a 'Greater India' cultural sphere; Oman and India's west coast would show 5,000 years of maritime links.

Q8 On blank maps: (a) Label India's neighbours. (b) Draw arrows showing cultural flows (e.g., food, festivals, languages) between India and her neighbours. (c) Imagine and redraw new 'borders of friendship' that connect neighbours through rivers, trade routes, or cultural zones. (d) Collect pictures of the flags of the countries listed in this chapter and write your observations.

SOLUTION

This is a hands-on map and research activity. Here is guidance on what to include:

(a) Label India's neighbours on a blank outline map of Asia:
Land neighbours (clockwise from northwest): Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar.
Maritime neighbours: Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand (in the Bay of Bengal / Indian Ocean region), Iran, Oman (in the Arabian Sea region).

(b) Draw arrows for cultural flows — some examples from the chapter:
India → Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia: Buddhism (arrow labelled 'Buddhism / Theravada / Vajrayana').
India ↔ Nepal: shared festivals (Dashain, Tihar, Holi), pilgrimage (Pashupatinath temple).
India ↔ Bangladesh: Bangla language, Sundarban, river systems (Ganga-Brahmaputra).
India → Malaysia, Singapore: Tamil language and community, Brahmi script heritage.
India ↔ Oman: maritime trade (5,000 years), copper ingots (Harappan era).
India → Thailand: Sanskrit kingdom names (Dvaravati, Ayutthaya), Ramayana stories.

(c) Redraw 'borders of friendship' — ideas:

Connect India, Nepal, and Bhutan in one zone through the Himalayan Buddhist-Hindu cultural belt.
Link India and Bangladesh through the Ganga-Brahmaputra river system.
Draw a sea-route friendship zone across the Bay of Bengal connecting India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia through the ancient 'Suvarnabhumi' trade network.
Connect India and Oman through the Arabian Sea maritime trade corridor.

(d) Flag observation activity:
Collect images of flags of: Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Iran, Oman, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia.
Look for: colours and symbols used, any religious or cultural symbols (e.g., the moon and star on Pakistan's flag, the dragon on Bhutan's flag, the Garuda symbol of Indonesia), and what each flag tells you about the country's identity and values.
Write 1-2 sentences of observation for each flag.

Answer: Hands-on activity: (a) Label all land neighbours (Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar) and maritime neighbours (Sri Lanka, Maldives, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Iran, Oman) on a blank map. (b) Draw arrows for Buddhism (India→Sri Lanka/Bhutan/Thailand/Indonesia), Bangla language (India↔Bangladesh), Tamil community (India→Malaysia/Singapore), and maritime trade (India↔Oman). (c) Draw friendship zones along shared rivers, the Himalayan Buddhist belt, and the Bay of Bengal sea-route network. (d) Collect flag images; note religious/cultural symbols (Bhutan's dragon, Indonesia's Garuda, Pakistan's crescent) and write brief observations.