Chapter 12: Resistance and Resilience (1000–1700 CE)

Questions — Let's Explore

Q1 Choose the most appropriate answer. Resistance and resilience are closely connected because: (a) Resistance always involves warfare. (b) Resilience enables communities to endure difficulties and sustain resistance. (c) Resistance is possible only when a kingdom has a large army. (d) Resilient societies avoid all forms of conflict.

(b) Resilience enables communities to endure difficulties and sustain resistance. The chapter explains that resilience is the 'backbone of resistance' — while political cause or leadership creates the condition for resistance, the ability to endure hardship comes from resilience. The two are deeply linked: without resilience, no resistance can be sustained over time.

Q2 Why and how did groups such as the Sikhs, Marathas, and Rajputs assert their political power and identity during periods of changing political authority?

These groups asserted political power and identity in response to Mughal expansion and religious discrimination. The Rajputs of Mewar maintained prolonged military resistance under Mahārāṇā Pratāp and later negotiated a treaty that formally preserved their autonomy. The Marathas, inspired by Chhatrapati Śhivājī's concept of swarājya (self-rule), used guerrilla warfare, a network of strategic forts, and broad alliances to establish an independent Maratha state in 1674. The Sikhs, following the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahādur, shifted towards armed collective organisation — forming misals, establishing the Akāl Takht, and creating the Khalsa — combining spiritual identity with political resistance. Each group used a distinct mix of military action, institutional building, and cultural assertion to safeguard its identity.

Q3 Why did some Rajput rulers decide to negotiate alliances with the Mughal power?

Some Rajput rulers chose to negotiate alliances with the Mughals out of strategic calculation rather than submission. The Mughals needed Rajput military strength, loyalty, and administrative expertise to consolidate and stabilise their vast empire. In return, Rajput rulers gained access to mansabs (ranks and offices), resources, and political security. For example, the Kachhwāha Rajputs of Amber entered a cooperative relationship with the Mughals, integrating into the imperial structure. Such alliances offered Rajput kingdoms protection, influence at the Mughal court, and the practical means to sustain their rule, even while others like Mewar chose continued resistance.

Q4 Imagine a market in a port town of India such as Surat, Masulipatnam, or Puducherry. You are a foreign trader from Italy or France and want to make a deal of cotton textiles. How would you secure the product in the local market? Whose help would you seek and what kind of challenges would you face in terms of language, quality of product, prices of commodities, etc.?

As a French trader arriving at Surat in the 17th century, I would first seek the help of a dubhaśhī — an interpreter-broker who could bridge the language barrier between French and Gujarati or Hindi. Through him, I would connect with a local sarrāf (money-changer) to exchange my currency using a hunḍī, avoiding the risk of carrying silver across the city. I would then approach a Gujarati merchant or a banjārā trader who controls the inland supply of cotton textiles. Challenges would include negotiating quality standards — different grades of cloth varied in thread count and dye fastness — and agreeing on prices in a market where local traders already had established relationships and information advantages. Cultural protocols, trust-building, and ensuring the contract was honoured would also be ongoing concerns. The merchant's network of agents (gumasthas) would ultimately decide whether I secured a reliable supply.

Q5 Watch any video at the given link (https://www.indianculture.gov.in/forts-of-india/tales-of-forts) and analyse the various functions of forts and fortresses. How did rulers perceive the importance of forts in terms of strategic concerns.

Guidance: Visit the link and watch any one fort's video. As you watch, note the following functions described in the chapter: (1) military — defensive walls, watchtowers, and armouries that withstood prolonged sieges; (2) administrative — forts served as centres of governance and judicial authority; (3) economic — water sources and food storage enabled self-sufficiency; (4) strategic — frontier forts acted as fallback capitals and launch points for guerrilla raids. In your analysis, explain how the Maratha forts like Raigad and Sinhagad, or examples such as Gingee Fort in Tamil Nadu, embodied these multiple functions. Rulers viewed forts as the nucleus of their resistance network, not merely defensive walls.

Q6 What architectural changes occurred in temple construction during the period under study? How do these changes reflect upon the resilient nature of Indian civilisation?

From the 16th century onwards, temple architecture adapted significantly to the threat of destruction. Temples were increasingly built in less visible locations — along narrow lanes, with entrances not opening onto main streets. Many no longer carried the conventional appearance of a temple; instead, they resembled ordinary havelī residences, which historians call 'havelī temples'. Tall shikharas were avoided and elaborate exteriors became rare. Examples can be found in Delhi, Varanasi, and Rajasthan, including the Jagat Shiromani Temple in Amer. These changes reflect resilience: communities preserved their spiritual and cultural life by adapting form while maintaining the essence of worship. Rather than abandoning tradition, people found creative ways to continue it under changed circumstances.

Q7 A kingdom has limited military resources but possesses fertile agricultural land, strong local support, and detailed knowledge of its terrain. Explain two ways in which these resources could contribute to the kingdom's resilience when faced with a threat.

First, detailed knowledge of local terrain allows a kingdom to adopt guerrilla warfare — conducting surprise raids, ambushes, and swift retreats rather than fighting pitched battles it cannot win. The chapter shows this clearly: Mahārāṇā Pratāp used the rugged Aravalli Hills to launch raids on Mughal supply lines, and the Ahoms exploited Assam's forests and rivers to force repeated Mughal retreats. Second, fertile agricultural land ensures a steady food supply, enabling the population and army to sustain prolonged resistance without running out of provisions. Strong local support means that people willingly supply food, shelter, intelligence, and recruits. Together, these non-military resources — terrain knowledge, agriculture, and community solidarity — can substitute for armies and outlast better-equipped invaders over time.

Q8 Consider the following statement: "A tradition becomes more resilient when people can carry it with them." Do you agree? Explain using examples from the Bhakti tradition.

Yes, this statement is well supported by the Bhakti tradition. The chapter explains that when temple construction was restricted or temples were destroyed, devotees turned to nām kīrtan — the recitation of the divine Name — a practice that required no physical structure. It could be performed anywhere. Similarly, community singing (sankīrtan) drew people together in open spaces, making devotional practice difficult to suppress. Bhakti saints composed hymns in local languages — Marathi, Awadhi, Bengali, Telugu — meaning that ordinary people could memorise and carry these songs wherever they went. Tulsidas's Rāmcharitmānas, for instance, brought the Rāmāyaṇa into everyday households across the Awadh region. A tradition encoded in song, memory, and community practice is portable — it belongs to the people, not to a building or institution.

Q9 Voices from the Past. Choose any two of the following and write a short first-person account explaining what resilience means from that person's perspective: A Bhakti saint / A Rajput soldier / An Ahom commander / A Maratha administrator / A merchant / A Jat leader.

Model answer — two first-person accounts. (1) An Ahom commander: 'The Mughals brought their cannon and their vast army, but they did not know our rivers the way we do. When Mīr Jumlā took Garhgaon, we did not despair. Our king renounced the treaty within a year. We waited, watched the floods, and struck when the Mughals were weakest. At Saraighat in 1671, our bāchārī boats outmanoeuvred their fleet on the Brahmaputra. Resilience, for me, means knowing that a temporary defeat is not a final one, and that our land, our people, and our patience are stronger than any invading force.' (2) A Bhakti saint: 'I own no temple, no land, no army. Yet I am free. When rulers demolished shrines, we gathered on riverbanks and sang together. The divine Name travels in the heart — it cannot be demolished. Lāl Ded reminds us: the scriptures are easy to learn but hard to live. I have chosen to live the path. That, to me, is resilience — not just surviving hardship, but preserving the essence of one's faith so that it remains alive for those who come after.' Any two correct accounts are acceptable.

Q10 Design a Fort. You are a military architect advising a ruler. Draw a simple, labelled plan of a fort that includes: Residential complex, Defensive walls, Water source, Food storage, Escape route, Watchtower, Administrative area. Write a few sentences explaining how your design would help the kingdom withstand a long siege.

Guidance: Draw a roughly rectangular or irregular plan (irregular fits a hilltop site). Label each of the seven required elements: thick defensive walls along the perimeter with a watchtower at each corner; a well or tank at the centre as the water source; granaries and food storage near the residential complex; an administrative hall near the main gate for governance and justice; a residential complex for the garrison and royal household; and a concealed escape route — a tunnel or narrow passage — leading to a nearby hillside or riverbank. In your written explanation, note how strong walls and watchtowers delay attackers; the internal water and food supply reduce dependence on the outside; the administrative area allows governance to continue under siege; and the escape route preserves the ruler's ability to regroup and counter-attack — as demonstrated by Mahārāṇā Pratāp retreating to the Aravalli Hills after the fall of Chittor.