

Chapter 7 - Nationalism

Question 1:

How is a nation different from other forms of collective belonging?

Answer:

Nation is, to a great extent, an 'imagined community' held together by the collective beliefs, aspirations and imaginations of its members. It is based on certain assumptions like shared beliefs, common history, common territory, shared political ideals and common political identity that people construct about the collective whole with which they identify themselves. Unlike family its members are not linked with face-to-face relation. It is different from clans and other kinship groups as it is not based on common descent. It is different from any lingual group as it is not based on a common language nor is it like a religious group as it does not share any common religion.

Question 2:

What do you understand by the right to national self-determination?

How has this idea resulted in both formation of and challenges to nation-states?

Answer:

Right to national self-determination means seeking the right by cultural groups to govern themselves and determine their future development as a nation.

The idea of national self-determination led to the formation of nation-state. As in case of Europe after First World-War, the countries were formed on the basis of culture they shared. It helped these groups to determine their future development path and to govern themselves.

This idea is also a challenge to the formation of nation-state as it is impossible to have one culture in a nation-state. It is impossible to ensure that each cultural group could achieve political independence and statehood. Examples for the same could be the mass migrations that took place after the re-organisation of state boundaries in Europe to maintain cultural homogeneity.

Question 3:

"We have seen that nationalism can unite people as well as divide them, liberate them as well generate bitterness and conflict". Illustrate your answer with examples.

Neither descent, nor language, nor religion or ethnicity can claim to be a common factor in nationalisms all over the world. Comment.

Answer:

- Nationalism unites people into a bond on the basis of same territory, shared beliefs, common history, shared political ideals, common political identity and aspirations.

- The idea of nationalism can liberate people from the bond of various smaller groups to a wider and common group of nation where they share common interests and goals.
- It can also divide the people as every lingual or cultural group could demand for a separate nation-state.
- It can generate bitterness and conflict as demands for separate nation state by smaller groups often leads to conflict. Such situations are at the root of many ongoing conflicts in the world.
- Neither descent, nor language, nor religion or ethnicity can claim to be a common factor in nationalisms all over the world as there is no common set of characteristics that is present in every nation. It is very difficult for every lingual, religious and ethnic group to become politically and economically viable. This also leads to several problems for those groups that are in minority. Therefore, no nation-state can stand only on the factor of religion or ethnicity.

Question 4:

Illustrate with suitable examples the factors that lead to the emergence of nationalist feelings.

Answer:

The factors that lead to the emergence of nationalist feelings are:

Shared beliefs – This refers to the collective identity and vision for the future of a group that aspires to have an independent political existence.

- The citizens of a nation-state share common beliefs irrespective of ethnic or religious differences.
- For example, every citizen of India wants the national hockey team to become world champion.

Common history – The citizens of a nation-state share a common history.

- It perceives them as stretching back into the past as well as reaching into the future.
- For example, Indians share a common history of nationalist movement and have the same vision for their future.

Common territory – It shares a common land or territory on which the people have been living for a long period of time. Thus, territory is an important component of unity.

For example, Indians identify themselves with the distinctive geographical features of the Indian subcontinent.

Shared political ideals – Citizens of a nation-state share a vision of the kind of state they want to build.

- They share same political ideas, they share commitment to a set of political ideas and are bound by a set of obligations legitimatised by the law of the state.
- For example, the Constitution of India that is representative of the collective will of the people has adopted democracy and secularism, among other ideals, as its goals.

Common political identity – The citizens share a common political identity irrespective of their religious, linguistic groups.

For example, a Sikh from Punjab, a Muslim from Uttar Pradesh and a Hindu from Karnataka share a common political identity of being Indian irrespective of their different religious and linguistic groups.

Question 5:

How is a democracy more effective than authoritarian governments in dealing with conflicting nationalist aspirations?

Answer:

- A democratic government is more effective than an authoritarian government as it respects the opinion of people and provides opportunity and rights to every cultural group to flourish.
- All cultural groups including those in minorities have the opportunity to be represented at the highest levels of decision making in a democratic set up. Thus, it provides a structure for all groups to express their aspirations.
- An authoritarian government will create an oppressive and authoritative society in which minority groups cannot survive. The dominance of the majority gives rise to nationalist aspirations among other groups in such situations.
- A democratic government respects the rights and cultural identity of minorities and therefore can solve conflicting nationalist aspirations by taking decisions through consensus that benefit all groups which stay inside the democratic set up.

Question 6:

What do you think are the limitations of nationalism?

Answer:

The limitations of nationalism can be cited as:

- Most nationalist ideals are representative of the goals of a single cultural group. Thus, they fail to incorporate the broader vision of inclusiveness.
- Since it is not possible for every cultural group to create its own nation-state therefore every nation-state has more than one cultural group.
- The different cultural groups often get involved in conflicts due to their separate nationalist aspirations and the principle of exclusivity based upon a desire for homogenous identity.
- The role of nationalism in a globalised world is yet to be completely evaluated as nationalist tendencies acquire a different meaning in an inter-connected world.