Long Walk to Freedom

Summary

This chapter is an extract from the autobiography of Nelson Mandela (born- 18 July, 1918 and died- 2013), the first Black President of South Africa.

It begins with the description of their inaugural ceremony which took place on the 10th of May 1994 in the Amphitheatre in Pretoria where the entire nation along with many international leaders embraced the victory of a newly and fairly elected government. It involved speeches by the President and the two Deputy Presidents followed by an impressive air show of fighter jets and helicopters.

Long ago, in the first decade of the twentieth century, white supremacy introduced the system of apartheid and made life a living hell for the dark-skinned population. It gave rise to one of the most inhumane societies of the world. Many people have struggled and sacrificed for basic human rights.

The author expressed his desire to thank all those freedom fighters who couldn’t live to see this autumn day. He referred to the citizens as the greatest asset of the country. It is these people he gathered his courage from.

Mandela believes that courageous is not the man who is fearless, but the man who has overcome fear. He also mentioned the two responsibilities every human has – one towards his family and the other towards his society. He also mentions how in order to fulfil his obligation towards his society, his obligation towards his family was neglected.

He became a man of people when he realised that the idea of freedom was an illusion for him and people like him. It was then he joined the African National Congress and fought for his rights till he became the first black President of the nation.

According to him, the oppressor is as much a prisoner as the oppressed. As soon as the former robs the oppressed of their freedom he, himself gets robbed of his humanity. Thus, the oppressor too, is not free.

**Question and Answers**

**ORAL COMPREHENSION CHECK PAGE NO. 18,19**

1. Where did the ceremonies take place? Can you name any public buildings in India that are made of sandstone?

A. The ceremonies took place in the amphitheatre which was formed by Union Buildings in Pretoria.

In India, we have many public buildings made of sandstone, some of which are Rashtrapati Bhavan, Red Fort and the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi.

2. Can you say how 10 May is an ‘autumn day’ in South Africa?

A. Since South Africa lies in the Southern Hemisphere; we can say that May fall in the autumn season. Here ‘autumn’ means an important day as Apartheid was removed and Democracy had won and it was on this day that the first democratic, non- racial government of South Africa was installed.

3. At the beginning of his speech, Mandela mentions “an extraordinary human disaster”. What does he mean by this? What is the “glorious … human achievement” he speaks of at the end?

A. By “an extraordinary human disaster”, Mandela is referring to the apartheid system that was prevalent in South Africa under the previous leadership. People

of colour were treated unfairly and no human being deserves that. He stood against the unjust practices and finally won the democratic elections to become the first black President of South Africa. He refers to this win as “glorious human achievement”.

4. What does Mandela thank the international leaders for?

A. The author thanked the international leaders for joining and supporting them in their victory of freedom, justice and human dignity. Earlier, many nations had cut ties with South Africa because of their practice of apartheid but now they had all come to witness this historic occasion.

5. What ideals does he set out for the future of South Africa?

A. As the newly elected President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela wanted to liberate the country of all the unjust practices. He set out ideals for a country which was free of poverty, discrimination and injustice.

***Oral comprehension check Textbook page no. 21***

6. What do the military generals do? How has their attitude changed, and why?

A. The military generals saluted Nelson Mandela and promised their support to the newly formed democratic government of South Africa. Their attitude has changed because earlier they were under the rule of the white supremacy. During that rule, they would have arrested Mandela as he was considered to be a criminal. Now, with the abolition of Apartheid and the formation of a democratic government, their attitude has also changed.

7. Why were two national anthems sung?

A. The two national anthems, one of the Blacks and other of the Whites were sung symbolising equality and respect for the entire community irrespective of their colour.

8. How does Mandela describe the systems of government in his country

(i) In the first decade, and  
(ii) In the final decade, of the twentieth century?

A. (i) In the first decade of the twentieth century, white supremacy created a system of racial domination and made life a living hell for the dark-skinned people. Mandela referred it as one of the “harshest, inhumane societies” of the world.  
(ii) In the final decade of the twentieth century, the system of apartheid has been changed into one that recognises all humans as equal regardless of their colour, race or gender.

9. What does courage mean to Mandela?

A. To Mandela, “courage” does not mean the absence of fear, but the victory over it. A man who is courageous is the one who has overcome his fear to fight all the odds.

10. Which does he think is natural, to love or to hate?

A. He believes love comes more naturally to humans as opposed to hate. No one is born with hatred in his heart for another.

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11. What “twin obligations” does Mandela mention?

A. According to Mandela, every person has “twin obligations”, one towards his family and the other, towards his society.

12. What did being free mean to Mandela as a boy, and as a student? How does he contrast these “transitory freedoms” with “the basic and honourable freedoms”?

A. As a young boy, and a student, Mandela’s idea of freedom was to be able to stay out at night, read whatever he desired and go wherever he chose. On growing up as a man, he realised that these were “transitory freedoms” he was looking for because their “basic and honourable freedoms” had been taken away. There was no liberty to have a peaceful marriage, family and life. Dark-skinned people were deprived of their fundamental human rights. For them, freedom was an “illusion”.

13. Does Mandela think the oppressor is free? Why/Why not? ( Board 2014)

A. According to Mandela, the oppressor is as much a prisoner as the oppressed. He is a prisoner of hatred,prejudice and narrow mindedness. As soon as the former robs the oppressed of their freedom he, himself gets robbed of his humanity. Thus, he thinks that the oppressor too, is not free.

14. Why did such a large number of international leaders attend the inauguration? What did it signify the triumph of?

A. At the inauguration ceremony, there were a large number of international leaders to celebrate the end of apartheid system and to display their support for South Africa. It signified the triumph of justice over prejudice, courage over fear and right over wrong.

15. What does Mandela mean when he says he is “simply the sum of all those African patriots” who had gone before him?

A. Mandela wanted to thank the generations before him who had fought for justice. He gathered his courage from these brave heroes and it is because of that, he fought fearlessly for what is right. Thus, he referred to himself as “simply the sum of all those African patriots” that had gone before him.

16. Would you agree that the “depths of oppression” create “heights of character”? How does Mandela illustrate this? Can you add your own examples to this argument?

A. Yes, I agree that “depths of oppression” create “heights of character”. Mandela illustrated this idea by the example of all those who had emerged as great freedom fighters after years of oppression and brutality. They were men with extraordinary courage and strength. One of the greatest examples is of our own country, where our people were exploited under British rule for about 200 years. As a result of oppression of such magnitude, India got freedom fighters like Bhagat Singh and Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru.

17. How did Mandela’s understanding of freedom change with age and experience?

A. As a young boy, and a student, Mandela’s idea of freedom was to be able to stay out at night, read whatever he desired and go wherever he chose. On growing up as a man, he realised that these were “transitory freedoms” he was looking for because their “basic and honourable freedoms” had been taken away. There was no liberty to have a peaceful marriage, family and life. Dark-skinned people were deprived of their fundamental human rights. For them, freedom was an “illusion”.

18. How did Mandela’s ‘hunger for freedom’ change his life?

A. Once Mandela realized his hunger for freedom, his life changed forever. It transformed him from a family-man to a man of his people and a frightened young man into a bold one. He built his entire life around fighting for the basic fundamental rights for his community.  He was more selfless and virtuous than ever.