

Independent India (The First 30 years - 1947-77)

Improve your learning

Q. 1. Identify the statement or statements in the bracket that is relevant to statements in italics on the left

- a) Political equality can be identified with (right to get admission in any school, the principle of one person one vote, right to enter any religious worship place)
- b) Universal adult franchise in the Indian context meant (allowing all people to vote for any political party, allowing all people to vote in elections, allowing all people to vote for Congress party)
- c) Congress dominance would include (being able to attract people from various ideologies; being able to win most state, assembly seats after elections; being able to use police force during the election)
- d) Emergency imposed (restrictions on people's rights; ensured eradication of poverty; accepted by all political parties)

Answer : (a) Political equality can be identified with the principle of one person one vote. Every vote has equal value, and no one is discriminated. Right to get admission in any school is the right to education, and the right to enter any religious worship place is the right to practise any religion.

(b) Universal adult franchise in the Indian context meant allowing all people above 18 yrs of age to vote in elections.

(c) Congress dominance would include being able to win most state assembly seats after elections.

(d) Emergency imposed restrictions on people's rights. It is proclaimed when the President is satisfied that the security of India or any part of the territory of India is threatened by war or external aggression or armed rebellion

Q. 2. What measures were taken to bring in socio-economic change during the initial years after independence?

Answer : Independent India was poverty stricken. In order to bring in social and economic change, Nehru set up the Planning Commission to carry out planned development in the country. The First Five Year plan adopted by India focussed on agriculture and the need for increasing food production. Nehru adopted three strategies to transform the rural sector.

Land reform: It included the abolition of the zamindari system, tenancy reform, and land ceilings. These led to the redistribution of agricultural land mainly in the hands of the tiller.

Agricultural cooperatives: The cooperatives helped farmers by providing them with valuable farm inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, at lower costs.

Local self-government: It monitored that land reforms were carried out and that cooperatives represent the collective interests of the village.

The first five-year plan also focussed on providing irrigation electricity facilities. It also stressed the need to industrialise India.

Q. 3. What do you understand about one-party dominance? Would you consider it as dominance only in elections or also in terms of ideology? Discuss with reasons.

Answer : One party dominance refers to the Congress dominance in the post-independence era both in national and state legislatures. It is not an undemocratic situation rather other parties also contest in elections but unable to win enough seats to challenge Congress. This dominance is characterized both in terms of elections and also in terms of ideology.

After independence congress managed to win election after election. No other party was capable enough to challenge the dominance of Congress.

Its dominance was not only limited at the centre but extended to states as well. It formed governments in most of the states, especially the northern states.

The Congress party was not a party with one ideology but rather represented the interest of different groups. It accommodated people from every section of society. Each voice formed a part of Congress. Thus, it had an umbrella-like character which further justified its dominance.

Q. 4. Language became a central rallying point in Indian politics on many occasions, either as a unifying force or as a divisive element. Identify these instances and describe them.

Answer : When India gained independence it was deeply divided. Religion had already torn the country into two. There were fears about the security and stability of India. Due to the multilingual character of the Indian state, it faced the demands for the reorganization of states on the basis of language. It was felt that this division on a linguistic basis would lead to the further breakup of the country. But the Congress leadership undertook this daunting task and promised to restructure the country on these lines.

Earlier people speaking different languages were living together. For instance, Madras Presidency constituted people speaking Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada Telugu, gondi and Oriya languages.

The first demand for reorganization came in 1953 from the Telugu speaking people of Andhra state. Potti Sriramulu was in the forefront of this movement. He went on a 58-day hunger strike after which he died. This led to outrage among people and a prolong agitation to separate the Telugu speaking areas from the state of Madras. Consequently, their demand was recognized and the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were created.

Similar demands came from other parts of the country. In order to deal with this issue, Nehru appointed the States Reorganization Commission in 1953 to address the issue of formation of states on the basis of linguistic principle. Based on its report, the states reorganization act was passed in 1956 which led to the creation of 14 new states and 6 union territories. As more demands came for separate states, they were recognized by the government.

At present, India has 29 states and 7 union territories. The fears that were developed at the time of independence did not achieve fruition. The creation of states on the basis of language did not hamper the unity of India but rather consolidated the union.

Another instance related to the position of language is the anti-Hindi agitation staged by DMK leaders with the passing of the Official Languages Act in 1963. It was seen as an attempt by the central government to impose Hindi language on the rest of the people. The country was divided between pro-Hindi and anti-Hindi camps. The state-wide campaigns led to a series of concessions by the central government. These included the right of each state to have a language of its own. English would be the medium of communication between the centre and states and many more. Thus it was ensured that things remain in control.

Q. 5. What were the major changes in the political system after the 1967 elections?

Answer : The 1967 election marked a landmark in the history of India. It brought a series of changes to the political system.

- The Congress party suffered its worst defeat till then. Although it came to power, with the lowest majority, it had since independence. Its vote share decreased, and there was a gradual loss of mass support.
- The Congress lost in as many as 8 state assemblies (Bihar, U.P., Rajasthan, Punjab, West Bengal, Orissa, Madras, and Kerela). Thus, its dominance declined.
- This was the first big transition in India as the party which ruled for two decades was now challenged.

- There was a rise in regional parties. In the southern states such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, DMK emerged victoriously. This made the political system more competitive.
- The defeat of Congress weakened the Congress internally. A new phenomenon of defection became evident, as the party members defected to opposition parties.
- For the first time in political history, the coalition was formed against the Congress. Samyukta Vidhayak Dal- which comprised of Jan Sangh, socialists, Swatantra and congress defectors, formed a government in the state.
- This period was characterized by the first democratic upsurge as intermediate and backward caste groups gained political power.
- Power became a key weapon to hold parties with different ideology united. Thus, politics was no longer governed by the ideology of the parties.
- There was a renewal in the demands for separate states. Thus, there was a rise in regional sentiment in different parts of the country.
- There was communal tension in different parts of the country. The new leadership headed by Indira Gandhi was not well equipped to handle the growing crisis in the system.
- The Congress party started shedding its umbrella-like character and focussed more on the poor and the downtrodden

Thus, a full-fledged democracy took roots in India and the country move towards a competitive multi-party system.

Q. 6. Think of the other ways in which states could have been created and how would they be better than language-based reorganization.

Answer : The other ways in which states could have been created would be on the basis of population. A particular state would have a fixed population, and it would be the same as other. This would have made administration much easier as every leader had to deliver to almost the same population. This would have also helped in maintaining the diversity of a state which would have strengthened the national unity.

Q. 7. What measures of Indira Gandhi are called 'left turn'? How do you think was this different from the policies of the previous decades? Based on the knowledge gained the economics chapters, describe how is it different from the current policies.

Answer : As Indira Gandhi came into power, she adopted a series of measures that benefitted the poor and the downtrodden and marked 'left turn' in her policies.

- She raised a popular slogan “Garibi Hatao” to show her sympathy with the poor section of the country.
- She adopted a series of social and economic policies that transformed the system. she pursued nationalization of private banks and abolished princely pensions. Such schemes gave a leftward orientation to the government.
- She adopted a socialist policy and shed the mixed character of the economic system.

These policies were markedly different from those adopted in the Nehru era.

- Nehru did not try to appease any particular section of society. He won elections based on national goals and did not target the poor or the rich.
- Nehru accommodated all voices in his party. His policies were far-sighted and took into consideration all the sections of society.
- Nehru adopted the path of the mixed economy, so as to accommodate both the leftist and rightist faction.
- To boost agriculture, Nehru introduced a new strategy called the green revolution. He also adopted land reforms to bring social and economic change.

In today's' scenario with the coming up of LPG (liberalization, privatization, and globalization) policies, the nature of the economic system has undergone a change. There is a move towards privatization and decline in government intervention. The policies are directed to bring more investment into the country. The state has lifted its hand from many areas. Although it remains a key player in Indian politics, there is a rightward orientation in our policies.

Q. 8. In what ways was the Emergency period a set back to the Indian democracy?

Answer : A series of events culminated in the imposition of emergency. The economic position of the country was very unstable. Inflation, scarcity of food and high unemployment brought general discontentment among the large section of the population. The promises made by Indira Gandhi were not met. As a result, the opposition under the leadership of Jay Prakash Narayan started a campaign against the Congress. This movement fumbled the position of Indira Gandhi. She reacted very harshly and imposed emergency on the Indian state in 1971.

The political mood of the country began to change.

- The government adopted a series of repressive measures to bring back law and order of the country.

- There was a violation of human rights, and the fundamental rights were suspended.
- There were instances of arbitrary detention and torture.
- A large number of political leaders who opposed Indira were put in jail.
- Press censorship and forced sterilization brought discontent among the people of the country.
- Most importantly, the 42nd constitutional amendment which brought a series of changes weakened the democratic fabric of the country.

Thus, the emergency was no less than a setback to the Indian democracy. In the absence of civil liberties, people were nothing but helpless. This period marks a stain in the Indian political history as power was used indiscriminately to fulfill personal motives. Huge crimes were committed by state leaders in the name of emergency.