

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XI · CODE 323

Nationalism

CUET unit: Political Theory — Nation, Nationalism and National Self-Determination

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Snapshot

- Defines nation and nationalism, distinguishes a nation from family, tribe, kinship and other groups.
- Traces nationalism's historical roles — unification (Germany, Italy, Latin America), break-up of empires (Austro-Hungarian, Russian, British, French, Dutch, Portuguese), and contemporary separatist movements (Quebecois, Basques, Kurds, Tamils).
- Explains the four constitutive assumptions of nationhood — shared beliefs, history, territory, and shared political ideals.
- Develops the principle of national self-determination, the "one culture–one state" idea, the Versailles experiment, and its costs (mass migration, communal violence).
- Argues that in plural societies the political conception of nationhood (loyalty to constitutional values) is preferable to a cultural one, and links this to India's constitutional protection of minorities and Tagore's critique of narrow patriotism.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

People commonly associate **nationalism** with patriotism, national flags, and sacrificing for the country. The Republic Day parade in Delhi is "a striking symbol of Indian nationalism" — it brings out the sense of power, strength and diversity which many associate with the Indian nation. It is difficult to arrive at a precise and widely accepted definition of nationalism, but it plays such an important role in world affairs that it must be studied (NCERT §7.1, p. 98).

During the last two centuries or more, nationalism has emerged as one of the most compelling political creeds which has helped to shape history. It has inspired intense loyalties as well as deep hatreds, united people as well as divided them, helped to liberate them from oppressive rule, and also been the cause of conflict, bitterness and wars (NCERT §7.1, p. 98). In nineteenth-century Europe, nationalism led to the unification of a number of small kingdoms into larger nation-states; the present-day German and Italian states were formed through such a process of consolidation. A large number of new states were also founded in Latin America. Along with the consolidation

of state boundaries, local dialects and local loyalties were gradually consolidated into state loyalties and common languages — and "the people of the new states acquired a new political identity which was based on membership of the nation" (NCERT §7.1, p. 98).

But nationalism also accompanied and contributed to the break-up of large empires — the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires in early twentieth-century Europe, and the British, French, Dutch and Portuguese empires in Asia and Africa. "The struggle for freedom from colonial rule by India and other former colonies were nationalist struggles, inspired by the desire to establish nation-states which would be independent of foreign control" (NCERT §7.1, p. 99). The process of redrawing state boundaries continues: since 1960 even apparently stable nation-states have been confronted by nationalist demands put forward by groups or regions, and these may include demands for separate statehood. Separatist movements have developed among the Quebecois in Canada, the Basques in northern Spain, the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq, and the Tamils in Sri Lanka. The language of nationalism is also used by some groups in India; Arab nationalism today may hope to unite Arab countries in a pan-Arab union, while separatist movements like the Basques or Kurds struggle to divide existing states (NCERT §7.1, p. 99).

A nation, NCERT insists, is not any casual collection of people. It is different from the family (which is based on face-to-face relationships with each member having direct personal knowledge of the identity of others) and different from tribes, clans and other kinship groups in which ties of marriage and descent link members. "As a member of a nation we may never come face to face with most of our fellow nationals nor need we share ties of descent with them. Yet nations exist, are lived in and valued by their members" (NCERT §7.2, p. 100). It is commonly believed that nations are constituted by a group who share certain features such as descent, language, religion or ethnicity. But "there is in fact no common set of characteristics which is present in all nations." Canada includes English and French speakers; India has a large number of languages and many religions; nor do nations share a common race or descent (NCERT §7.2, p. 100). Following Benedict Anderson, the nation is "to a great extent an 'imagined' community, held together by the collective beliefs, aspirations and imaginations of its members" (NCERT §7.2, p. 100).

There are four constitutive assumptions of nationhood. **Shared beliefs** come first: a nation is not like mountains, rivers or buildings — it does not exist independent of the beliefs people have about it. "A nation exists when its members believe that they belong together" (NCERT §7.2, p. 101). **History** is the second pillar: "people who see themselves as a nation also embody a sense of continuing historical identity," drawing on collective memories, legends and historical records. Nationalists in India invoked the country's ancient civilisation and cultural heritage; Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in **The Discovery of India** that "though outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety among the people, everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness, which held all of us together in ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us"

(NCERT §7.2, pp. 101–102). **Territory** is the third: nations identify with a particular territory — homeland, motherland, fatherland, or holy land. The Jewish people, "in spite of being dispersed and scattered in different parts of the world always claimed that their original homeland was in Palestine, the 'promised land'." The Indian nation identifies with the rivers, mountains and regions of the Indian subcontinent. Since more than one set of people may lay claim to the same territory, the aspiration for a homeland has been a major cause of conflict in the world (NCERT §7.2, p. 102). **Shared political ideals** is the fourth: a shared vision of the future and the collective aspiration to have an independent political existence distinguishes a nation from other groups. Members of a nation share a vision of the kind of state they want to build, affirming values like democracy, secularism and liberalism, and bind themselves through obligations to one another as citizens (NCERT §7.2, pp. 102–103).

For a **common political identity** rather than a cultural one, giving two precise reasons: "One, all major religions in the world are internally diverse" with sects differing significantly in their interpretation of religious texts; ignoring these differences and forging an identity on the basis of a common religion is likely to create a "highly authoritative and oppressive society." "Two, most societies are culturally diverse" — imposing a single religious or linguistic identity as a condition of belonging would exclude some groups, restrict religious liberty of the excluded, or disadvantage those who do not speak the national language. Hence "democracies need to emphasise and promote loyalty to a set of values that may be enshrined in the Constitution of the country rather than adherence to a particular religion, race or language" (NCERT §7.2, p. 103). **§ 7.3 National self-determination** — the claim of nations to recognition by the international community as a distinct political entity or state. Nineteenth-century Europe popularised the notion of "one culture – one state," which was employed while reordering state boundaries after World War I. The Treaty of Versailles established a number of small newly independent states, but it proved virtually impossible to satisfy all demands for self-determination; re-organisation of state boundaries led to mass migration of populations and many became victims of communal violence (NCERT §7.3, p. 104). The Basque case study (p. 105) and the Asian-African liberation movements (p. 106) show the paradox that newly independent nation-states have themselves had to face self-determination demands from their own minorities. "The solution does not lie in creating new states but in making existing states more democratic and equal" (NCERT §7.3, p. 106) — carried forward in §7.4 on nationalism and pluralism.

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Nation	A largely "imagined" community held together by shared beliefs, aspirations, history, territory and political ideals; members may never meet yet feel they belong together.	100–101
Nationalism		98

Term	Definition	Page
	A political creed claiming that a community sharing certain bonds aspires to, and deserves, an independent political existence.	
National self-determination	The claim of a nation to recognition as a distinct political entity/ state and to govern itself.	104
One culture – one state	The 19th-century European doctrine that each cultural group should have its own state — basis of post-WWI Versailles re-ordering.	104
Imagined community	A nation conceived not by face-to-face contact but by collective beliefs, memories and aspirations of its members.	100
Pluralism (in nationhood)	Recognition and protection of multiple cultural, linguistic and religious identities within a single nation-state, as in India's constitutional scheme.	107
Patriotism (per Tagore)	A loyalty to nation which Tagore refused to make humanity's "final spiritual shelter".	108
Shared beliefs	First pillar of nationhood — a nation exists when members believe they belong together.	101
Historical identity	Second pillar — sense of continuing identity through collective memories, legends, records.	101–102
Territory / Homeland	Third pillar — motherland, fatherland or holy land identification.	102
Shared political ideals	Fourth pillar — shared vision of the future state and mutual obligations as citizens.	102–103
Common political identity	Loyalty to constitutional values rather than to a single religion, race or language.	103
Treaty of Versailles (1919)	Post-WWI settlement applying one-culture-one-state, creating several small new states.	104
Quebecois	Separatist nationalist movement in Canada.	99
Basques	Autonomous prosperous region of northern Spain seeking statehood; language banned by Franco.	99, 105
Kurds	Stateless people in Turkey and Iraq cited as a self-determination movement.	99
Tamils (Sri Lanka)	Tamil nationalist/separatist movement cited as a contemporary example.	99
Arab nationalism	Pan-Arab union aspiration cited as a uniting (not dividing) nationalist project.	99
Pan-Arab union	Aspirational unity of Arab countries.	99
Group rights		107

Term	Definition	Page
	Constitutional protection of language, culture, religion and sometimes representation for minorities.	
Tagore's critique	Distinction between opposing western imperialism and rejecting western civilisation; "patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter."	108
Reinterpreted self-determination	Granting democratic rights to a nationality within a state rather than independent statehood.	109
Multiple identities	Each person carries identities of gender, caste, religion, language, region; democracy must allow expression of all.	109
Homogenising nationalism	Intolerant, identity-flattening nationalism (a danger NCERT highlights).	109

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

The **Republic Day parade in Delhi** (p. 98) is a striking image of Indian nationalism that combines power, strength and diversity — a useful anchor for case-based MCQs that ask which event is a "striking symbol" of Indian nationalism. The boxed cartoon dialogues (pp. 99, 101) staging conversations about whether nationalism is irrelevant in the age of globalisation and what counts as nationalist behaviour are recurring MCQ stimuli. The **Basque box** (p. 105) — illustrated with a map of Spain showing the Basque region in the north — is the most heavily quarried case study; CUET stems frequently ask which language was banned by Franco, why Basque nationalists are dissatisfied with mere "autonomous" status, and what proportion of Basques today understand the Basque language ("only one-third"). The **Tagore critique box** (p. 108) carries the quoted passage "Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity. I will not buy glass for the price of diamonds, and I will never allow patriotism to triumph over humanity as long as I live." Memorise this quotation and its attribution.

Two process lines should be drilled. The first is the **four-step constitution of nationhood**: Shared Beliefs → Historical Identity → Territory → Shared Political Ideals, leading to Common Political Identity (pp. 101–103). The second is the **causal chain of self-determination**: One-Culture-One-State doctrine → Treaty of Versailles (1919) → creation of small newly independent states → mass migration and communal violence → unresolved minority problem → reinterpretation of self-determination as democratic rights within an existing state (pp. 104–109). Aspirants should be able to reproduce both chains from memory because match-the-following items in CUET have used these stages as List I or List II entries.

2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Republic Day Parade, Delhi		p. 98

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
	Cited as a striking symbol of Indian nationalism (power, strength, diversity)	
Unification of Germany and Italy (19th c.)	Nationalism as consolidation of small kingdoms	p. 98
Latin American new states	Nationalism founding new states	p. 98
Break-up of Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires	Nationalism as solvent of empires	p. 99
Decolonisation of British, French, Dutch, Portuguese empires	Anti-colonial nationalism in Asia and Africa	p. 99
Indian freedom struggle	Cited as a nationalist struggle for an independent nation-state	p. 99
Quebecois (Canada)	Contemporary separatist nationalism	p. 99
Basques (Spain)	Autonomous region; Franco-era ban on Basque language	pp. 99, 105
Kurds (Turkey and Iraq)	Stateless nationalism	p. 99
Tamils (Sri Lanka)	Separatist nationalism	p. 99
Pan-Arab union	Arab nationalism as a uniting force	p. 99
Nehru, <i>The Discovery of India</i>	Cited for the "tremendous impress of oneness" passage	p. 102
Palestine / Jewish "promised land"	Example of homeland identification across diaspora	p. 102
Treaty of Versailles (1919)	Post-WWI application of one-culture-one-state	p. 104
Franco's dictatorship (Spain)	Ban on Basque language in public places and homes	p. 105
Indian Constitution — minority protections	Group rights for religious, linguistic and cultural minorities	p. 107
Tagore quotation	"Patriotism cannot be our final spiritual shelter; my refuge is humanity"	p. 108

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

1. **Nation ≠ tribe/clan/family.** A nation does not depend on face-to-face contact or shared descent, unlike tribes, clans, families and other kinship groups (p. 100). Distractors swap these.
2. **No single common feature** (language, religion, race, descent) is present in all nations — Canada (English + French) and India (many languages and religions) are

the cited refutations (p. 100). Trap options assert "common language" or "common religion" as essential.

3. **Treaty of Versailles is post-WWI**, not post-WWII (p. 104). It was unable to satisfy all self-determination demands and triggered mass migration plus communal violence — not "successfully resolved minority problems."
4. **Self-determination has been "reinterpreted"** — it no longer automatically means independent statehood but democratic rights within an existing state (p. 109). Trap options frame statehood as the only legitimate form.
5. **Tagore opposed western imperialism but did NOT reject western civilisation** (p. 108). He criticised the narrow expressions of nationalism, not patriotism per se. Watch for distractors saying he "rejected western culture entirely."
6. **Basque is an "autonomous" region within the Spanish federation**, not yet a separate country (p. 105). Only **one-third** of Basques today understand the Basque language; Franco **banned** it, he did not "promote" it.
7. **Arab nationalism is presented as a uniting (pan-Arab union) aspiration**, whereas Basque/Kurd movements are dividing-existing-state aspirations (p. 99). Stems sometimes flip the direction.
8. **The four constitutive elements are Shared Beliefs, History, Territory and Shared Political Ideals** — NOT race, not common descent (pp. 101–103). NTA frequently inserts "common race" as a fifth distractor option.
9. **Common political identity** in a democracy is built on loyalty to **constitutional values**, not to a particular religion, race or language (p. 103). Distractors invert this.
10. **Indian Constitution's minority protections** include group rights for language, culture and religion, and sometimes representation in legislatures (p. 107) — these are constitutional, not merely statutory.
11. **Nationalist movements in Asia and Africa** asserted self-determination against colonial rule, but newly independent states have themselves had to deal with internal self-determination demands — a paradox (p. 106).
12. **Each person has many identities** (gender, caste, religion, language, region); intolerant, homogenising nationalism is dangerous (p. 109). Trap options frame multiple identities as a "threat to nationalism."

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

In CUET (UG) 2023–25, the Political Theory section has consistently drawn 1–2 MCQs from this chapter, usually as direct-recall items on the meaning of nation/nationalism, statement-based items on the four assumptions (beliefs, history, territory, shared ideals), or match-the-following items on separatist movements (Basques, Kurds, Quebecois, Tamils). Case-based stems on the Basque movement and assertion–reason items on the political-versus-cultural conception of nationhood are also common. The Tagore quotation box (p. 108) and the Nehru **Discovery of India** passage (p. 102) recur in attribution-style stems; the Versailles → mass migration causal chain on pp. 104–106 has been tested in cause-effect and sequence formats. Aspirants should memorise the Basque case study (autonomous status, Franco's ban, one-third language fluency) and the closing argument on multiple identities verbatim.

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