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Q3(a)

What do you mean by nation building? What is the role of religion in nation building? Elaborate your answer

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Define nation building in the Indian sociological sense
- **Explain religion as both mortar and fissure:** pluralism, personal law, nationalism, communalism
- Use Partition, **Gandhi-Nehru-Ambedkar**, secularism debates, and contemporary majoritarianism
- Avoid sermon; show mechanisms

Revision summary

Nation building is the creation of a shared political community on top of a diverse social structure.

In India religion provides both unifying symbols and census-based fracture lines.

Partition, personal law, and **Articles 25-28** institutionalised that double role.

Secularism, Ambedkarite critique and majoritarian nationalism are competing methods of building the we.

The outcome depends on courts, parties and everyday pluralism, not on religion vanishing.

Introduction

Nation building is the long work of turning a **state** into a **felt political community**: a people who share institutions, a story, and some willingness to pay tax and accept the vote of strangers. In India that work began under colonial sociology of communities and exploded at **Partition**. Religion is not a side theme. It is one of the main languages in which the nation is imagined, contested and administered.

Body

What nation building requires

M. N. Srinivas and later political sociologists stressed a **horizontal solidarity** across caste and region. **A. R. Desai** read the national movement as a bourgeois project with peasant and working-class tributaries. **Partha Chatterjee** split the inner spiritual domain from the outer material domain of the colonial state. Nation building after 1947 meant Constitution, planning, official language bargains, and a **developmental state** that promised dignity without erasing diversity.

Religion's double role

Religion supplied **symbols of sacrifice** (Gandhi's Ram, Khilafat, Gurbani in the INA's mixed registers) and **everyday pluralism**-shared shrines, syncretic practice, the constitutional bundle of **Articles 25-28**. It also supplied **enumerated majorities and minorities** (census, separate electorates, personal law). **T. N. Madan** and **Ashis Nandy** criticised Nehruvian secularism as too thin for believers; **Rajeev Bhargava** defended a principled distance. **Ambedkar** warned that Hinduism as social structure (caste) could not be the unspoken nation unless annihilated.

- **Mechanisms of fracture:** riot systems (Paul Brass), temple-mosque litigation, personal-law exceptionalism, and party mobilisation of sacred geography. Mechanisms of binding: a common electoral roll, military and cricket public, pilgrimage mixed with tourism, and court-enforced rights. **Uniform Civil Code** remains a sociological test: equality of citizens versus autonomy of religious groups.

Contemporary **majoritarian nationalism** tries to nation-build through a dominant religious identity. That can produce a strong we-feeling for some and a **second-class script** for others. Classical Congress secularism tried to nation-build around religion as private and personal-law as group right. Both are nation-building strategies; they allocate dignity differently.

Religion will not leave the Indian nation. The sociological question is whether it remains a **plural public ethic** or becomes a **boundary of blood and census**.

Flow diagram

Nation building -> Constitution and vote
 Nation building -> Religious symbols and law
 Religious symbols and law -> Plural coexistence
 Religious symbols and law -> Communal majorities
 Constitution and vote -> Plural coexistence

Conclusion

Nation building in India is the making of a civic we on a religiously dense society. Religion can sacralise the Republic or split it into enumerated flocks. Institutions-vote, court, school, personal law-decide which face prevails, not a hope that belief will simply fade.

Facts & figures

Articles 25-28

Constitutional cluster on freedom of religion, religious instruction and administration of religious institutions.

Partition 1947

Massive religious demographic sorting that made minority/majority a founding fact of both successor states.

Ambedkar

Argued that political democracy without social (caste-religious) democracy would be incomplete nationhood.

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