

Book Review: A Journey in Service by Ibrahim B. Babangida

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Introduction

Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's *A Journey in Service* is a landmark autobiographical account that offers a deeply reflective and historically grounded narration of his personal evolution from a humble upbringing in Minna to the zenith of Nigeria's political leadership. Published in 2025, the work is structured with meticulous care, segmenting Babangida's life into five major thematic parts: early years, military career, governance, retirement, and reflective epilogue. The author represents a significant contribution to the autobiographical and political literature of post-independence Nigeria. As Nigeria's former military president (1985–1993), Babangida remains a pivotal, albeit polarising, figure in the country's modern history. His memoir offers insight into the motivations, dilemmas, and philosophies that underpinned his leadership during a particularly volatile era. The work serves not only as a record of events but also as a rhetorical attempt to reshape public perception of his controversial policies and decisions.

Chapter 1: Wushishi, Minna, and the Gwari Native Authority Primary School

The first chapter provides rich contextual background into Babangida's family lineage and early life. The narrative explores his formative environment in Wushishi and Minna, reflecting on cultural heritage and early education. It effectively paints a picture of colonial Northern Nigeria, setting the stage for the author's future trajectory. It reflects on his formative years, beginning from his roots in Wushishi, a quiet but culturally rich town in present-day Niger State. Wushishi is portrayed as a close-knit community where traditional values—respect for elders, communal living, and discipline—were strongly emphasised. Growing up in this environment helped shape his early worldview. The serene rural setting, combined with the strong moral foundations taught at home, laid the groundwork for the humility, resilience, and sense of duty that would later define his public life and military career.

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As he matured, Babangida's journey took him from Wushishi to Minna, a more urban and bustling environment compared to his hometown. Minna offered broader exposure to social interactions, leadership encounters, and educational opportunities. The move marked a significant shift, as it introduced him to a more structured societal setting and to influences beyond his immediate community. Minna's diversity—ethnic, social, and economic—increased his awareness of the wider Nigerian society and deepened his understanding of how people interact within a more complex communal framework.

One of the most defining institutions in this early phase of his life was the Gwari Native Authority Primary School, where he received his foundational education. The school is depicted as more than just an academic space; it was an environment that nurtured character, discipline, and a sense of responsibility. The teaching system of the Native Authority era placed strong emphasis on moral instruction, civic duty, and the value of hard work. Babangida recalls how the school environment encouraged punctuality, obedience, neatness, and respect for rules—qualities that would later serve him well in the Nigerian Army.

The interactions with teachers and classmates at the Gwari Native Authority Primary School also exposed him to competition, teamwork, and leadership roles at an early age. The school's curriculum, though basic by today's standards, provided a solid foundation in literacy, numeracy, and communication. More importantly, it cultivated in him a desire for advancement and a belief that education could serve as a ladder to greater opportunities.

These three elements—his childhood in Wushishi, his transition to Minna, and his formative schooling at the Gwari Native Authority Primary School—come together in the memoir to paint a picture of a young boy molded by culture, shaped by community, and prepared by education for a future of service. Babangida often emphasises that without these early experiences, the path that eventually led him to the military and national leadership might have taken a very different turn.

Chapter 2: Provincial Secondary School, Bida

The author delves into his secondary school years, describing the rich multicultural milieu of Government College, Bida. The chapter captures the academic rigour, formative friendships, and early ideological leanings that foreshadowed his leadership qualities. The camaraderie among peers who would later shape Nigerian governance is a significant historical insight. The author's entrance into Provincial Secondary School, Bida, and an institution that he describes as one of the most defining stages of his personal and intellectual development. The chapter highlights how this transition from primary to secondary school opened a new phase of opportunity, discipline, and exposure that would shape much of his future character.

1. Transition to a More Structured Educational Environment

Babangida's arrival at Provincial Secondary School, Bida, marked a significant elevation from the familiar environment of his Native Authority primary schooling. The school represented a more formal and demanding academic setting, where students were expected to adapt

quickly to stricter routines, higher expectations, and a more competitive academic culture. He portrays the school as a microcosm of Nigeria—bringing together students from different towns and ethnic backgrounds. This diversity exposed him to new perspectives, broadened his social understanding, and helped him develop interpersonal skills that would prove crucial in his later leadership roles.

2. Discipline, Routine, and Character Formation

One of the themes Babangida emphasises is discipline, which was deeply ingrained in the school's culture. Early morning drills, strict adherence to timetables, neatness inspections, and conduct evaluations were integral parts of student life. This discipline was not imposed merely for punishment, but to cultivate responsibility, maturity, and self-management. Babangida describes this phase as a period when he began to understand the value of order and consistency—traits that drew him naturally towards military life later on.

3. Academic Influence and Intellectual Growth

The chapter also explores how the school shaped him intellectually. The teachers at Bida were described as committed and knowledgeable, exposing students to a broad curriculum that fostered curiosity and academic resilience. Subjects such as English, Mathematics, Geography, and History stimulated his interest in national affairs, human behaviour, and the wider world beyond Niger Province. This intellectual stimulation helped him build confidence, sharpen decision-making abilities, and develop a mindset geared toward leadership and service.

4. Social Life, Friendships, and Early Leadership Experiences

Beyond academics, Provincial Secondary School, Bida offered Babangida a rich social environment. He formed friendships that lasted decades—some of them with future military and public figures. The school environment encouraged teamwork, healthy competition, sportsmanship, and social responsibility. He participated in school activities that required leadership, cooperation, and initiative, laying the foundation for what would later become his well-known leadership style—strategic, inclusive, and calm under pressure.

5. The School as a Gateway to the Military

Toward the end of the chapter, Babangida reflects on how his years at Bida prepared him for the next big step: joining the Nigerian Military Training College. The discipline, academic grounding, and exposure to leadership roles had shaped him mentally and emotionally for the structured, hierarchical world of the military.

Thus, Provincial Secondary School, Bida is presented not merely as an educational institution but as a launching pad that connected his formative years to his future in national service.

This chapter serves as a deeply reflective and formative portion of Babangida's memoir.

It reveals how education, discipline, exposure, and early leadership experiences laid the groundwork for his journey into public life and the military. The narrative emphasises that

success is built on small, consistent foundations, and Provincial Secondary School, Bida provided those foundations—academically, socially, and morally.

Chapter 3: A Young Officer and a Gentleman

Here, Babangida chronicles his entry into the Nigerian Military Training College. The chapter emphasises the discipline, structure, and national service ethos instilled during training. It also provides a concise military historiography of Nigeria, enhancing its academic and historical value. *A Journey in Service* marks a crucial turning point in Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's life, capturing his early years as a young military officer and the transformative experiences that shaped his professional identity, discipline, and sense of national duty. This chapter provides insight into how a young man from Wushishi and Bida evolved into a principled, confident, and self-assured officer in the Nigerian Army.

1. Entry into Military Training College and Early Impressions

Babangida recalls his entry into the Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC), Kaduna—an institution modeled after British military tradition and known for its rigorous discipline. In this chapter, he reflects on the shock of transitioning from a regular school environment into the highly regimented, hierarchical, and physically demanding atmosphere of military life. The chapter emphasises how the strict routines—early wake-up calls, constant drills, repeated physical exercises, and rigid inspections—were designed to break down civilian habits and rebuild the trainees into disciplined officers. Babangida describes this transformation as challenging but necessary, forming the mental toughness that would define his career.

2. The Concept of “A Gentleman Officer”

A central theme in this chapter is the idea that a military officer is not just a soldier but also a gentleman—a person of integrity, honour, dignity, and responsibility. Babangida presents the institution's ethos, which stressed morality as strongly as military competence.

Traits such as:

Honesty, Courage, Loyalty, Humility, and Respect for seniors and subordinates, are unquestionable discipline which were instilled in officers from the earliest stages. Babangida explains that to be a “gentleman officer” was to embody these values both in uniform and in private life.

3. Academic and Professional Training

Another important aspect of the chapter is Babangida's emphasis on intellectual and tactical training. He notes that military education was not solely about physical robustness; it required: strategic thinking, deep understanding of military history, proficiency in weapons, map reading and navigation, leadership psychology, and effective communication.

Babangida highlights the role of British and Nigerian instructors, whose combined methods blended colonial military discipline with emerging Nigerian leadership ideals. This academic exposure deepened his understanding of warfare, national security, and organisational command.

4. Camaraderie, Brotherhood, and the Formation of Lifelong Bonds

A major part of the chapter focuses on the friendships forged in the military. Living, training, and suffering together created a strong sense of camaraderie. These early bonds with fellow officers—many of whom later became key figures in Nigerian military and public life—proved influential throughout his career. Babangida portrays the military environment as a leveller where class, ethnicity, and background mattered little. What counted was performance, discipline, and loyalty. This culture taught him teamwork, mutual respect, and the importance of unity.

5. Early Leadership and First Assignments

The chapter also describes Babangida's first experiences in leadership positions. Even as a young officer, he began to demonstrate decisiveness, calmness under pressure, and the ability to motivate others—qualities that later defined his leadership style. His early deployments introduced him to the realities of field operations, command responsibilities, and the expectations placed on junior officers. He learned to make quick, rational decisions and to balance personal conviction with military protocol.

6. Internal Transformation and Growing Sense of Duty

Throughout the chapter, Babangida emphasises that the military shaped not just his skills but also his worldview. He developed a deeper sense of patriotism and began to understand the complexities of serving a young nation going through political evolution and social change. The military was no longer merely a career choice; it became a calling. Babangida suggests that this period planted the seeds of responsibility, sacrifice, and national commitment that later guided him in higher leadership roles.

The chapter offers a reflective and deeply personal insight into Babangida's transformation from a promising young recruit into a disciplined, confident, and morally grounded officer.

It highlights: the intensity of military formation, the values of honour and integrity, the intellectual and strategic demands of officer training, and the social networks that shaped Nigeria's military elite. As a chapter in a memoir, it functions both as personal history and as a statement of what military service meant to him—responsibility, sacrifice, and the pursuit of excellence.

Chapter 4: The Nigerian Civil War and the NDA Teaching Years

A compelling account of his involvement in the Civil War, this chapter reveals Babangida's resilience, tactical experience, and teaching role at the NDA. It underscores his loyalty and

sacrifice, notably his injury at the Okigwe front. It is one of the most historically significant sections of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's memoir. It presents a dual narrative: his involvement in the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) and his subsequent role as an instructor at the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA). The chapter highlights critical stages in his military career—moments that tested his courage, shaped his worldview, and strengthened his conviction in Nigeria's unity.

1. Nigeria on the Brink: Context of the Civil War

The chapter opens with Babangida's recollection of Nigeria's turbulent political climate in the mid-1960s. The military coups of 1966, ethnic tensions, and the eventual secession of the Eastern Region created an atmosphere of national uncertainty. Babangida uses this background to explain why the Nigerian military saw it as a patriotic duty to preserve the country's territorial integrity. His reflections show his understanding of the war not merely as a military operation but as a painful national tragedy that demanded sacrifice, discipline, and strategic leadership.

2. Babangida's Role in the Civil War: Courage under Fire

Babangida recounts his active participation in several key operations during the Civil War. As a young officer, he was posted to the frontlines where he experienced the chaos and brutality of warfare firsthand. The chapter emphasises: Close-range battles and tactical manoeuvres. Moments of near-death encounters. The emotional weight of losing colleagues. The leadership challenges of commanding troops in unpredictable terrain.

One of the most striking elements in the narrative is Babangida's emphasis on resilience and duty. He describes how the rigours of the war tested not only physical strength but also mental fortitude. The experience hardened him, sharpening his sense of responsibility and reinforcing his belief in Nigeria's indivisibility.

3. Lessons Learned from the Civil War

The chapter gives considerable attention to the lessons Babangida drew from the conflict. These include: Understanding the limits of force. Military might alone could not restore peace without reconciliation and trust. The complexity of ethnic relations in Nigeria. The war exposed deep-seated mistrust, making national unity a delicate and ongoing project. The importance of strategic leadership. Field commanders needed calmness under pressure, empathy for troops, and readiness to adapt. Appreciation of sacrifice.

He came to respect the courage of soldiers on both sides and the suffering endured by civilians. These lessons shaped his later views on governance, conflict resolution, and nation-building.

4. Transition from Warfront to Teaching: Posting to the NDA

After the war, Babangida was posted to the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) as an instructor. This transition from active combat to academic teaching marked a new phase in his career. He describes the shift as both challenging and rewarding. The NDA demanded: Intellectual

depth to teach military tactics, leadership, and strategy; Patience and mentorship to shape the next generation of officers; Professionalism to uphold the high standards expected of military trainers.

Babangida's teaching role helped him refine his knowledge of military science and sharpen his communication and leadership skills.

5. Influence on the Next Generation of Officers

Babangida reflects with pride on his contribution to shaping young cadets who later became important figures in Nigeria's military and public life. His teaching experience made him appreciate the critical role of military education in preserving discipline, professionalism, and national service. He notes that the NDA environment demanded continuous learning—from both cadets and instructors. This emphasis on education reinforced his belief that a strong military institution must rest on knowledge, not just command.

6. Personal Growth and a Broader Worldview

The combination of frontline experience and academic teaching broadened Babangida's worldview. He began to view the military not only as an instrument of war but as a pillar of national stability, intellectual development, and civic responsibility. This chapter shows a maturing Babangida: more reflective, more strategic, more aware of Nigeria's fragility, and more committed to public service. Chapter Four is pivotal in the memoir because it captures the most transformative period of Babangida's early military career.

The narrative blends personal experience with national history, showing how the Civil War and NDA years shaped his: discipline, leadership philosophy, understanding of Nigeria's ethnic challenges, and commitment to unity and service. It is a chapter filled with tension, growth, sacrifice, and reflection, offering readers insight into how war and education forged the character of one of Nigeria's most influential military leaders.

Chapter 5: The Murtala Muhammed Years

This section recounts his rising military responsibilities and loyalty to the Murtala/Obasanjo regime. It provides key insights into power dynamics and preparations for national leadership. It reflects on the era of General Murtala Ramat Muhammad, deepening the insights he shared earlier and offering a broader understanding of how this short but powerful period reshaped Nigeria's military, political, and administrative landscape. This chapter also explores Babangida's personal engagements and observations as a young officer navigating a rapidly changing environment under a leader whose vision and decisiveness left an indelible mark on the nation.

1. Consolidation of Reforms: Momentum and Impact

Babangida describes how, following the initial burst of reforms in 1975, Murtala Muhammad intensified efforts to overhaul Nigeria's governance system. Chapter Five highlights how the administration sought to consolidate earlier achievements and push for deeper structural change.

Key reform areas include: Reorganisation of the federal structure to decentralise power and strengthen administrative efficiency; improved financial discipline through strict controls and audits; Strengthening of the civil service, compelling officers to adopt higher standards of accountability and transparency; Review of government parastatals to eliminate waste and duplication.

Babangida emphasises the speed and determination with which Murtala moved, creating a sense of national urgency and purpose. Citizens felt that Nigeria was finally being steered in a firm, principled direction.

2. Murtala's Vision of Federalism and National Integration

Another important theme in this chapter is Murtala's evolving vision for Nigeria's federal structure. Babangida explains that Murtala recognised the tensions created by regional inequalities and political rivalries, and he believed that strengthening federalism was essential to stabilising the nation.

The chapter discusses: State creation efforts aimed at giving minority groups a voice; Federal character principles designed to promote inclusiveness; A more equitable distribution of resources to reduce inter-regional tensions; Urban redevelopment plans, including the transformative idea of moving the national capital from Lagos to a more central location—later realised as Abuja.

Babangida presents these reforms as evidence of Murtala's long-term thinking and his desire to heal historical grievances.

3. Military Professionalism and Reorientation

Babangida pays special attention to the internal reforms Murtala initiated within the armed forces. These reforms were meant to rebuild professionalism, morale, and discipline after years of political involvement and the psychological impact of the Civil War.

The chapter highlights: Reduction of political interference in military affairs, improved training and retraining programs. Emphasis on merit and competence, a more responsible military ethos, grounded in service rather than power. For Babangida, these reforms were crucial in improving the morale of officers and in restoring public trust in the military institution.

4. Foreign Policy and Nigeria's Bold Stand in Africa

Building on ideas introduced earlier, Chapter Five expands on Nigeria's assertive foreign policy under Murtala. Babangida notes that the administration's stance against colonialism and apartheid elevated Nigeria's status globally.

Highlighted areas include: Support for liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia; A firm diplomatic stance against South African apartheid; A stronger voice within the Organization of African Unity (OAU); A confident assertion of Nigeria's role as a regional power. Babangida describes Murtala as unapologetically bold—unafraid to challenge global powers when defending Africa's dignity.

5. Babangida's Personal Observations within the Military Hierarchy

As a rising officer, Babangida had a unique vantage point to observe how the reforms affected the military's internal dynamics. He notes that many officers admired Murtala's courage, although some felt unsettled by the rapid pace of change.

From Babangida's perspective, the Murtala years taught important lessons about: Leadership under pressure, the necessity of moral authority, the delicate balance between firmness and fairness, the importance of securing public confidence. The role of decisiveness in achieving reform. These personal reflections show how Murtala's leadership model influenced Babangida's own understanding of command and service.

6. The Tragic Turning Point: Aftermath of the Coup

While the previous chapter described the assassination itself, Chapter Five examines the aftermath. Babangida reflects on the grief, confusion, and disbelief that swept through the military and the nation. He describes the incident as a painful test of Nigeria's resilience.

Key implications discussed include:

Loss of a transformative leader, Transition of leadership to General Olusegun Obasanjo, Determination within the military to preserve stability, Resolve to continue Murtala's reform agenda, especially the transition to civil rule. Babangida suggests that the handling of the transition showed the commitment of the military leadership to national continuity and honouring Murtala's vision.

The chapter, deepens the exploration of the transformative but short-lived era of General Murtala Muhammad. It reveals: the consolidation of bold reforms, the strengthening of Nigeria's federal system, the professionalisation of the military, the assertiveness of Nigeria's foreign policy, and the enduring influence of Murtala's leadership.

For Babangida, this era reinforced the idea that true leadership requires courage, clarity, and conviction. Even though Murtala's administration was brief, the momentum and moral force it created shaped Nigeria's political future—and profoundly influenced officers like Babangida who witnessed these events from within the military.

Chapter 6: Mounting the Saddle, Defining a Military Presidency

Babangida reflects on the 1985 coup and his ascendancy to the presidency. This chapter is crucial for understanding the ideological and administrative reorientation he sought. The critical point in Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's memoir, focusing on his ascent to power and the formative years of his military presidency. The chapter provides a reflective account of the challenges, strategies, and philosophy that shaped his leadership style as the head of Nigeria's military government. Babangida examines both personal and institutional dimensions of leadership during a complex period of political transition, national expectation, and socio-economic reform.

1. The Political Context and the Challenge of Leadership

Babangida begins the chapter by situating his presidency within Nigeria's turbulent political environment. Following periods of military coups, civil unrest, and economic instability, the nation was in urgent need of a leadership style that could stabilise the polity while preparing the country for eventual civilian rule. He emphasises that mounting the saddle was not just a literal assumption of power but a symbolic representation of the immense responsibility placed on his shoulders. Babangida acknowledges that the presidency required balancing multiple pressures: expectations from the Nigerian public, internal military dynamics, the complexities of federalism, and the broader international political environment. This backdrop sets the stage for understanding the calculated strategies he deployed as a military ruler.

2. Defining the Military Presidency: Principles and Philosophy

A central theme of the chapter is Babangida's effort to define what a military presidency should entail. He reflects on the difference between military command and political leadership, emphasising that governing a nation demands more than force—it requires vision, pragmatism, and strategic patience.

He outlines several principles that guided his approach: Institutionalisation of governance: Ensuring that decisions were systematic, transparent, and supported by bureaucratic structures rather than ad hoc measures. Gradual reform and cautious transition: Balancing the need for rapid change with the importance of stability and continuity.

Flexibility and adaptability: Recognising the fluid nature of political, economic, and social circumstances and adjusting policies accordingly. Inclusiveness: Seeking broad-based support across ethnic, religious, and regional lines to maintain national cohesion. Babangida presents his presidency as a process of experimentation—learning while governing, and governing while learning.

3. Structural and Economic Reforms

Chapter Six also highlights the early reform measures of Babangida's administration. He discusses efforts to strengthen Nigeria's economy, streamline government functions, and reduce inefficiencies in public service. Key initiatives include: Economic stabilisation programs, aimed at curbing inflation and improving revenue management. Civil service restructuring, promoting meritocracy and accountability. Agricultural and industrial policies, designed to increase productivity and reduce dependence on imports. Foreign investment initiatives, opening Nigeria to strategic partnerships while safeguarding national interests. Babangida underscores that these reforms were both politically and technically challenging, requiring careful negotiation with internal stakeholders and international actors.

4. Leadership Challenges and Decision-Making

A significant portion of the chapter reflects on the personal and institutional challenges of leading as a military president. Babangida recounts: the delicate balance between authority

and consultation, the need to anticipate and manage dissent within the military, the pressures of maintaining public confidence, and the personal sacrifices required by leadership. He also emphasises his use of advisory councils, committees, and technocrats to ensure decisions were informed and effective, reflecting a deliberate attempt to professionalise governance even under military rule.

5. Nation-Building and Political Transition

Chapter Six emphasises Babangida's long-term vision for Nigeria. Unlike some of his predecessors, he viewed military rule as a transitional phase rather than a permanent solution. He details strategies aimed at: Political liberalisation; Preparations for civilian governance; Institutional reforms to strengthen democracy; Promoting national unity amidst ethnic and regional tensions. Babangida portrays his tenure as a balancing act—using military authority to stabilise the nation while creating space for political development.

6. Reflections on Personal Leadership

The chapter concludes with Babangida's introspection about his own role as a military president. He reflects on: the weight of responsibility, the importance of moral and intellectual integrity, the need to learn from predecessors and contemporaries, and the enduring lesson that leadership is ultimately about service, not power. He stresses that defining a military presidency required not only operational competence but also vision, humility, and foresight.

In addition the chapter offers a reflective and strategic examination of Babangida's early years as Nigeria's military president. It emphasises: the challenges of governing under military authority, the principles guiding his leadership style, early economic and administrative reforms, preparations for political transition, and the personal dimensions of command and responsibility. The chapter is both historical and introspective, providing readers with a nuanced understanding of military governance, leadership philosophy, and nation-building in Nigeria during a critical period.

Chapter 7: Reforming the Economy: Privatisation, IMF, SAP, and other Matters

An essential economic discourse, this chapter discusses the controversial Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and its socioeconomic impact. It is a vital source for analysing neoliberal policy adoption in Africa. Chapter Seven of *A Journey in Service* focuses on the complex and controversial economic reforms that marked General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's tenure as Nigeria's military president. The chapter provides an in-depth reflection on his administration's efforts to stabilise the economy, implement structural adjustment programs (SAP), engage with international financial institutions like the IMF, and introduce privatisation initiatives aimed at reviving national productivity and global competitiveness.

1. Context: Economic Challenges in Nigeria

Babangida begins the chapter by setting the stage: Nigeria faced a dire economic situation in the 1980s. Key challenges included: declining oil revenue, which had long been the backbone

of government funding, massive fiscal deficits and rising public debt, inefficient and overstaffed state-owned enterprises, inflation and currency instability, and declining agricultural and industrial productivity.

The chapter emphasises that these challenges required bold, decisive, and sometimes unpopular interventions. Babangida frames economic reform not as a political choice but as a national necessity.

2. Structural Adjustment Program (SAP): Objectives and Rationale

A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to explaining the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which Babangida's administration implemented with guidance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

He outlines the goals of SAP: Restoring fiscal balance by reducing government deficits, Promoting non-oil exports to diversify revenue sources, Controlling inflation through tighter monetary policies, Liberalising trade to encourage competition and foreign investment, and Reducing government control over industries that could operate more efficiently under private ownership.

Babangida emphasises that SAP was a response to both domestic inefficiencies and global economic pressures. While controversial, he defends its rationale as necessary to prevent economic collapse.

3. Privatisation and Economic Liberalisation

Chapter Seven also examines privatisation initiatives, which Babangida describes as a key tool for improving efficiency and accountability. He highlights several aspects: Transfer of ownership from public to private hands in sectors like transportation, telecommunications, and manufacturing, Encouraging private-sector participation in industries formerly dominated by government monopolies, Promoting competition as a means of increasing productivity and reducing waste, Improving the quality of goods and services for Nigerian citizens.

Babangida acknowledges criticism that some privatisation measures appeared rushed or imperfectly executed, but he frames these policies as essential steps toward a modern, market-driven economy.

4. Engagement with the IMF and International Institutions

Babangida reflects on Nigeria's engagement with the IMF, World Bank, and other financial institutions. He discusses: Negotiating loans and credit lines under stringent conditionalities, balancing domestic economic priorities with international expectations, implementing reforms required by lenders while trying to minimise social disruption, using these engagements to restore investor confidence in Nigeria. He portrays these efforts as delicate diplomacy, requiring both technical economic knowledge and political skill.

5. Challenges and Public Perception

The chapter does not shy away from discussing domestic resistance and controversies surrounding economic reform. Babangida acknowledges that SAP and privatisation policies: caused short-term hardships for many Nigerians, led to protests, strikes, and widespread public debate, were often misunderstood or misrepresented in political discourse. He emphasises the importance of communication, transparency, and phased implementation to mitigate social tensions, noting that leadership in economic reform requires both firmness and empathy.

6. Lessons Learned and Reflection on Economic Governance

Babangida concludes Chapter Seven by reflecting on the broader lessons of economic reform: Economic reforms are often painful but necessary for long-term sustainability. Balancing local interests and international obligations is essential for national growth. Institutional capacity-building is as important as policy design. Political will and leadership determine the success of reform programs. He frames his economic policies as part of a broader effort to modernise Nigeria's economy, restore fiscal discipline, and prepare the country for global engagement.

Chapter Seven presents a comprehensive and reflective account of Nigeria's economic reforms under Babangida. It combines: historical context, policy rationale, implementation challenges, public reception, and personal reflection on leadership and governance. For readers, the chapter serves as both a historical record of Nigeria's economic reforms in the 1980s and a study in leadership under crisis, illustrating the complexities of implementing bold economic policies in a politically and socially diverse nation.

Chapter 8: The Pursuit of a New Socio-Economic Order - MAMSER, DFRRI, People's Bank, Community Banks, etc.

Focused on grassroots mobilization and economic inclusion, this chapter details innovative initiatives. It represents Babangida's attempt to domesticate development and democratise credit access. It focuses on the initiatives of the Babangida administration aimed at fostering socio-economic development and national transformation in Nigeria. This chapter emphasises the creation of institutions, programs, and policies designed to empower citizens, strengthen rural economies, and promote social welfare, reflecting the administration's commitment to people-centered development.

1. Context: Socio-Economic Challenges in Nigeria

Babangida begins the chapter by highlighting the structural socio-economic challenges that Nigeria faced during his administration: widespread poverty, especially in rural areas, lack of access to basic financial services, high levels of unemployment, particularly among youth and women, insufficient infrastructure and limited access to education and healthcare. He argues that these challenges required innovative, grassroots-driven solutions, complementing broader macroeconomic reforms like SAP and privatisation.

2. MAMSER: Mobilising the Masses for Social and Political Change

A central focus of the chapter is the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) program. Babangida describes MAMSER as a critical instrument for promoting: civic responsibility and political awareness among citizens, the culture of self-reliance and entrepreneurship, social justice through equitable distribution of resources, and national unity and cohesion by reducing ethnic and regional tensions. He emphasises that MAMSER was not only a program for government policy implementation but also a tool to educate citizens on their rights, duties, and the importance of active participation in national development.

3. DFRRI: Focus on Rural Development

Babangida discusses the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) as a flagship program aimed at improving living conditions in rural Nigeria. The chapter highlights its objectives: construction of feeder roads to connect rural communities with markets, improvement of water supply, electricity, and basic amenities, promotion of agricultural productivity through access to inputs and technical support, reduction of rural poverty by creating employment opportunities.

He presents DFRRI as an effort to bridge the rural-urban development gap and empower citizens at the grassroots level, emphasising that socio-economic development must reach all segments of society.

4. People's Bank and Community Banks: Financial Inclusion and Empowerment

Another key section of the chapter examines initiatives in the banking and financial sector aimed at empowering Nigerians, particularly those traditionally excluded from formal banking services. Babangida discusses: The People's Bank of Nigeria, created to provide credit and financial services to low-income earners, small-scale entrepreneurs, and rural populations; Community Banks, designed to operate within local areas, encourage savings, and provide accessible loans to stimulate small businesses; the role of these institutions in promoting micro-finance as a tool for poverty alleviation and community empowerment. He stresses that financial inclusion was central to building self-reliance and supporting the broader socio-economic reform agenda.

5. Integration of Programs for a New Socio-Economic Order

Chapter Eight emphasises that MAMSER, DFRRI, the People's Bank, and Community Banks were not isolated programs but part of a comprehensive socio-economic strategy. Babangida presents them as interlinked initiatives designed to: promote self-reliance and social responsibility, empower rural communities and vulnerable populations, stimulate economic activity at the grassroots level, and foster national development that is inclusive and participatory. He underscores that this approach aimed to complement macroeconomic reforms with micro-level interventions, ensuring that reforms had tangible benefits for ordinary Nigerians.

6. Reflections on Successes and Challenges

Babangida reflects candidly on both the achievements and limitations of these programs: Successes included the creation of employment opportunities, enhanced rural infrastructure, and increased civic engagement through MAMSER; Challenges included administrative bottlenecks, inconsistent funding, limited public awareness, and resistance to change in some communities; Lessons learned emphasised the importance of community participation, transparency, and sustainable implementation. He concludes that while not all goals were fully realised, these programs laid the foundation for people-centered development in Nigeria.

Chapter Eight presents a detailed account of Babangida's socio-economic vision for Nigeria, emphasising inclusiveness, empowerment, and grassroots development. It highlights: innovative programs designed to foster self-reliance and social justice, the integration of rural development with financial inclusion, the centrality of citizens' engagement and participation in national development, and the complexities of implementing large-scale social programs in a diverse nation. For readers, the chapter serves as both a historical record of Babangida's policy initiatives and a case study in socio-economic planning and development strategy.

Chapter 9: Towards a Dynamic Foreign Policy

This chapter outlines Babangida's Pan-African diplomacy and efforts to assert Nigeria's leadership in continental and global politics. Chapter Nine of *A Journey in Service* explores the evolution and execution of Nigeria's foreign policy under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida. In this chapter, Babangida reflects on how his administration sought to reposition Nigeria as a key diplomatic actor in Africa and on the global stage through a dynamic, flexible, and interest-driven foreign policy. He provides insight into diplomatic strategies, regional interventions, peacekeeping operations, and the philosophy guiding Nigeria's external relations.

1. Context: Nigeria's Foreign Policy before Babangida

The chapter opens with a historical overview, acknowledging Nigeria's longstanding commitment to Afrocentric foreign policy since independence. Prior administrations had emphasised: decolonisation movements, anti-apartheid struggle, promotion of African unity, non-alignment during the Cold War. Babangida builds on this foundation but argues that Nigeria needed a more dynamic, responsive, and strategic approach to adapt to global changes in the 1980s and early 1990s.

2. Philosophy of a Dynamic Foreign Policy

Babangida describes "dynamic foreign policy" as one rooted in: national interest, flexibility, pragmatism, economic diplomacy, security cooperation, and strategic leadership in Africa. He argues that Nigeria could no longer be reactive or idealistic; it needed to be proactive—anticipating global shifts and positioning itself as a regional anchor. "Dynamic foreign policy" involved adjusting strategies to emerging global realities such as: the end of the Cold War,

shifting geopolitical alliances, the rise of global economic institutions, increasing regional conflicts in West Africa.

3. Regional Leadership and ECOWAS

One of the strongest elements of Babangida's foreign policy was his emphasis on regional stability. He discusses Nigeria's leading role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), including: driving economic integration in West Africa, advocating for collaborative security arrangements, supporting regional infrastructure and trade initiatives. He highlights Nigeria's commitment to collective security, which would later be embodied in the creation of ECOMOG (the ECOWAS Monitoring Group).

4. Peacekeeping and the Birth of ECOMOG

A major part of the chapter focuses on the establishment and deployment of ECOMOG, particularly during the Liberian civil war. Babangida presents this as a defining moment in Nigeria's foreign policy and continental leadership. He emphasises: Nigeria's moral responsibility to protect regional peace, the need to prevent the spillover of conflict into neighboring countries, Nigeria's financial, military, and diplomatic investment in the peacekeeping mission, the challenges of coalition-building among ECOWAS members. Babangida justifies ECOMOG as a bold example of Africa taking responsibility for its own security rather than relying solely on global powers or the United Nations.

5. Anti-Apartheid and Pan-African Commitments

Babangida reaffirms Nigeria's dedication to ending apartheid in South Africa. He discusses: diplomatic pressure on the apartheid regime, financial support for liberation movements, advocacy in the United Nations and Commonwealth. He positions Nigeria as a "frontline supporter" of African liberation, emphasising that moral leadership was just as essential as political strength.

6. Strengthening Global Partnerships

The chapter also explores Nigeria's relationships beyond Africa. Babangida reflects on: maintaining non-alignment while engaging major powers like the U.S., Britain, and the USSR, strengthening ties with Middle Eastern nations, particularly during the Gulf War period, expanding economic diplomacy in Asia and the Pacific, Nigeria's representation in global institutions such as the UN, OPEC, and the Non-Aligned Movement. The administration sought to balance strategic alliances with protecting national sovereignty, ensuring Nigeria remained relevant in global geopolitics.

7. Economic Diplomacy and National Development

Babangida links foreign policy with domestic economic goals. He argues that diplomacy must serve development by: attracting investment, facilitating trade agreements, securing financial assistance when necessary, opening Nigerian markets to global opportunities. Economic

diplomacy was not only about negotiation; it was also framed as creating opportunities for Nigerian entrepreneurs, technocrats, and industries.

8. Challenges in Implementing Foreign Policy

Babangida acknowledges that foreign policy during his tenure faced several obstacles: global political volatility, internal political tensions, financial constraints caused by economic reforms, criticisms over Nigeria's heavy spending on peacekeeping missions, leadership expectations placed on Nigeria as Africa's "big brother." Despite these challenges, he insists that Nigeria had to assert itself, otherwise risk irrelevance on the continent.

9. Reflections on Nigeria's Role in the World

The chapter concludes with Babangida reflecting on Nigeria's identity as a nation with: demographic strength, economic potential, strategic location, military capability, and historical leadership in Africa. He argues that dynamic foreign policy was about matching Nigeria's size and potential with appropriate diplomatic ambition. He sees his foreign policy legacy as one that strengthened Nigeria's influence and laid the foundation for modern regional diplomacy.

Chapter Nine provides a rich, reflective exploration of Nigeria's foreign policy objectives and achievements under Babangida's administration. Key themes include: regional leadership, peacekeeping, economic diplomacy, African solidarity, and Nigeria's strategic global identity. The chapter is valuable for understanding how Nigeria sought to balance national interest with international responsibility and how Babangida viewed diplomacy as an essential tool of governance and national development.

Chapter 10: The Challenges of Leadership

A reflective discourse on the burdens of governance. Babangida presents a philosophical take on leadership, accountability, and nation-building. Chapter Ten of *A Journey in Service* offers one of the most introspective portions of Ibrahim B. Babangida's memoir. In this chapter, he moves away from the technicalities of governance and policy to reflect more deeply on the nature of leadership itself, drawing from his personal experiences as a soldier, administrator, and head of state. It is a philosophical and reflective chapter that reveals his understanding of the burdens, dilemmas, and responsibilities inherent in leadership, especially in a complex nation like Nigeria.

1. Understanding Leadership as a Burden of Responsibility

Babangida begins the chapter by acknowledging that leadership is far more than holding a position of authority. He describes leadership as a heavy responsibility, one that continually demands courage, vision, and moral clarity. According to him, every leader must navigate: the weight of public expectation, the unpredictability of political and social challenges, the consequences of decisions that can impact millions of citizens, and the constant need to balance

personal conviction with national interest. He emphasises that leadership is a “calling” rather than a privilege, and one that exposes individuals to rigorous scrutiny and profound pressures.

2. The Complex Dynamics of Leading a Diverse Nation

A major theme of this chapter is the challenge of leading Nigeria’s highly diverse society, characterised by: ethnic plurality, religious differences, regional tensions, competing political interests, and varying levels of economic development. Babangida stresses that effective leadership in Nigeria requires sensitivity to this diversity. He argues that a leader must be able to: unify different groups under a shared national vision, negotiate conflict without favoritism, dispel distrust among communities, and ensure fairness in decision-making. He presents his tenure as one constantly shaped by the need to maintain balance among Nigeria’s complex social forces.

3. Decision-Making under Pressure

Babangida reflects on the nature of decision-making, especially in times of crisis. He notes that leaders are often compelled to make: quick decisions with incomplete information, unpopular decisions that are nonetheless necessary, strategic decisions that may only be appreciated in hindsight.

He admits that leadership demands both firmness and flexibility—knowing when to take a stand and when to listen, when to act and when to wait. He highlights that not all decisions produce immediate positive results, but the leader must always be guided by integrity and long-term national interest.

4. The Moral and Ethical Dimensions of Leadership

The chapter places strong emphasis on the moral foundations of leadership. Babangida argues that leadership must be rooted in: honesty, accountability, fairness, discipline, and selflessness. He acknowledges that leaders are often tested ethically, especially when faced with conflicting advice or pressures from interest groups. True leadership, he insists, is demonstrated by remaining aligned with one’s values despite such pressures.

5. Leadership in Times of Change and Uncertainty

Babangida positions his administration within a period of profound transformation in Nigeria: economic restructuring, political transition programs, regional security challenges, public discontent over reforms like SAP, and global geopolitical shifts. He asserts that leading during such an era required a dynamic, adaptive mindset, capable of adjusting policies to emerging realities. He highlights that leadership in times of uncertainty demands: patience, strategic thinking, deep engagement with experts, and steadfast commitment to national stability. Thus, leadership is portrayed as a continuous learning process rather than a fixed state of knowledge.

6. The Burden of Criticism and Public Scrutiny

Babangida openly discusses the reality that leaders are frequently criticised—sometimes fairly, sometimes unfairly. He writes that a leader must develop: thick skin, emotional intelligence,

humility, and an ability to distinguish constructive feedback from destructive opposition. He admits that criticism is an inevitable part of leadership, but insists that how a leader responds to criticism often determines the success or failure of their mission.

7. Leadership as Service, Not Power

Towards the conclusion of the chapter, Babangida emphasises that leadership is ultimately about service to the nation. He rejects the notion of leadership as a means of personal elevation or power. Instead, he frames the role as: stewardship over national resources, responsibility for national unity, and accountability for the well-being of citizens.

According to him, the true measure of leadership lies not in titles but in impact—how well the leader improves lives and strengthens institutions.

8. Reflections and Lessons Learned

Babangida closes the chapter with personal reflections on his own leadership journey. Some of the key lessons he highlights include: leadership requires continuous self-assessment. A leader must cultivate emotional and mental resilience. No leader succeeds without a competent and loyal team. The needs of the nation must always outweigh personal or sectional interests. He presents leadership as both a privilege and a sacrifice, one that demands commitment, humility, and an understanding of the broader historical purpose.

Chapter Ten serves as a philosophical and reflective analysis of leadership from the viewpoint of a military head of state. The themes explored include: the weight of responsibility, the difficulty of governing a diverse nation, the complexity of decision-making, the necessity of moral integrity, the challenges of public scrutiny, and the unwavering requirement of selfless service. For scholars, students, and analysts, the chapter provides useful insight into the thought processes behind Babangida's leadership style and offers broader lessons applicable to contemporary political leadership in Nigeria and beyond.

Chapter 11: The Home Front: My Life with Maryam

A touching and personal narrative about his family life and the influential role of his wife, Maryam Babangida, in national image and women's affairs. Chapter Eleven provides an intimate and revealing insight into the private life of the author, shifting the focus from public office and national policy to the deeply personal sphere of marriage, family, and companionship. It explores the relationship between the author and his wife, Maryam, offering readers a nuanced portrait of how the demands of public office intersected with domestic obligations, emotional bonds, and shared aspirations. This chapter enriches the narrative by humanising the author and showing the indispensable role of Maryam not only as a spouse but as a partner in national service.

1. Marriage as a Foundation of Stability

The chapter begins by highlighting the author's early years of marriage to Maryam, stressing the emotional stability and grounding influence she provided. Against the backdrop of intense military training, postings, political turbulence, and leadership challenges, Maryam emerges as a stabilising anchor. The author reflects on how her calm nature, discipline, and strong moral compass helped him navigate the uncertainties of military life.

Their marriage is portrayed not just as a union of affection but also as a strategic partnership where Maryam understood the weight of the author's responsibilities and offered steadfast support. Her ability to maintain a peaceful home front gave the author the mental clarity necessary to lead.

2. Maryam's Role as a Confidant and Adviser

A central theme in the chapter is Maryam's role as a trusted confidant. She is depicted as someone who listened attentively, offered honest counsel, and helped the author evaluate situations more holistically. Her advice often served as an internal compass during moments of crisis or indecision.

This dynamic not only showcases the strength of their relationship but underscores how Maryam influenced her husband's leadership style, particularly his empathy, attention to social welfare, and dedication to national reform.

3. Family Life behind the Curtains of Power

The chapter provides glimpses into the complexities of balancing a demanding public role with family obligations. The author describes how Maryam shouldered much of the responsibility for raising their children, managing the household, and maintaining normalcy despite the public scrutiny that accompanied high office.

Maryam is portrayed as a protective mother with a keen awareness of how political life could affect the children. She worked tirelessly to ensure that they were grounded, educated, and shielded from the pressures of their father's prominence. The author's reflections in this section reveal a deep appreciation for sacrifice—highlighting how Maryam often had to put aside personal ambitions to support the larger calling of leadership.

4. Maryam as a Public Figure: The Emergence of “Better Life for Rural Women”

A major highlight of the chapter is Maryam's evolution from a private spouse to a national figure through her involvement in public welfare programs. Her passion for improving the lives of women, especially rural women, led to the creation of the famous Better Life for Rural Women Program—one of the most transformative social initiatives of the era.

The chapter discusses: her vision for grassroots empowerment, the nationwide acceptance of the programme, her ability to mobilise women leaders across different states, the political and social implications of her initiatives, how her work complemented the broader national agenda.

This section portrays Maryam not merely as a First Lady but as a reformer who built institutions, drove national awareness on gender issues, and contributed significantly to Nigeria's socio-economic development.

5. Marriage under Pressure: Sacrifice, rumours, and Public Expectations

The chapter acknowledges the unique pressures that come with being the spouse of a political leader. Maryam faced intense public scrutiny, rumours, and expectations. Yet, the author notes her resilience, dignity, and ability to rise above distractions. This part of the chapter explores: the emotional toll of political tensions, the strain of security threats, how the couple navigated gossip and criticisms, the discipline required to maintain privacy in a public life. Through these accounts, readers gain insight into the human cost of national leadership on family members.

6. A Partnership Rooted in Shared Values

A recurring element in the author's narrative is the shared values that bound the couple together—discipline, humility, service, faith, and compassion. Their relationship is shown as one that matured over the years, strengthened by trials, and enriched by mutual respect. The chapter emphasises that Maryam's influence extended beyond the home. Her worldview shaped many of the author's policies centred on social justice, community development, and nation-building.

7. Legacy and Reflections

In the concluding part of the chapter, the author reflects on the enduring legacy of Maryam's life. Her initiatives, compassion, and national contributions are celebrated as part of the broader story of Nigeria's social transformation. He pays tribute to her strength, intelligence, and sacrifices, acknowledging that his journey in leadership would have been incomplete without her unwavering encouragement. This reflective tone adds emotional depth to the chapter, transforming it from a chronological account into a heartfelt tribute.

Chapter Eleven serves as an important turning point in the book, shifting from political events to personal experiences. It offers a profound examination of marriage, partnership, and the indispensable role Maryam played both in the home and in national development. Through detailed reflections on companionship, family, sacrifice, and public service, the chapter humanises the author and enriches his leadership narrative with emotional authenticity.

Chapter 12: Transition to Civil Rule and the June 12 Saga

Arguably the most controversial chapter, it offers Babangida's explanation of the annulled 1993 elections. It balances personal responsibility with contextual justifications. Chapter Twelve stands as one of the most politically charged, emotionally intense, and historically consequential sections of the book. In it, the author revisits the turbulent period marked by the attempt to transition Nigeria from prolonged military rule to democratic governance, culminating in the

crisis surrounding the June 12, 1993 presidential election. The chapter provides a first-hand account of events that shaped Nigeria's political destiny, revealing behind-the-scenes' decisions, internal conflicts, and the heavy burden of leadership during a national crisis.

The chapter is both analytical and reflective, inviting readers to examine the complexities of political reform under a military regime while grappling with the moral and institutional challenges that accompanied the June 12 debacle.

1. Background to the Transition Programme

The author begins by outlining the motivations behind initiating a transition to civil rule. After years of military dominance—and growing domestic and international pressures for democratisation—there arose a need to chart a clear path toward constitutional governance.

This section explains: The rationale for initiating the transition programme. The desire to stabilize Nigeria's political environment. The need to restore legitimacy to governance. The pressures from civil society, labour unions, and the international community. The author portrays the transition programme as a detailed, phased process intended to gradually transfer power to elected civilians through the creation of political institutions, parties, and electoral systems.

2. Designing and Implementing Political Structures

In this portion, the author discusses the mechanics of the transition: Formation of two government-created political parties, establishment of electoral bodies, drafting and adoption of a new constitution, organisation of elections at local, state, and national levels.

The narrative highlights the challenges of reorganising Nigeria's political landscape, with emphasis on: regional tensions, power struggles among political elites, attempts to prevent old political actors from dominating the new dispensation, managing public expectations. The author emphasises that the transition was intended to be transparent, credible, and inclusive, even though military oversight remained strong.

3. The Presidential Primaries Crisis

A major section of the chapter is devoted to the controversies that arose during the initial presidential primaries. According to the author, widespread allegations of corruption, vote-buying, manipulation, and misconduct forced the military government to nullify the primaries.

The author explains: Why the primaries did not meet set standards. How the military feared that releasing flawed results could destabilise the country. The political backlash that followed the cancellation. Efforts to reorganise and introduce new nomination procedures. This episode marks the beginning of a chain of events that would eventually culminate in the June 12 saga.

4. The June 12, 1993 Presidential Election

This section forms the emotional core of the chapter. The author recounts the presidential election widely regarded as the freest and fairest in Nigeria's history. **Moshood Kashimawo Olawale (M.K.O.) Abiola** emerged as the presumed winner, with overwhelming national support that cut across religious, ethnic, and regional divides.

The chapter captures the excitement and hope generated by the election, emphasising high voter turnout, peaceful conduct of the voting process, the unifying effect of Abiola's candidacy, the sense that Nigeria had reached a democratic turning point. The author acknowledges the exceptional credibility of the election, which only deepens the significance of subsequent events.

5. Annulment of the June 12 Election

The most controversial segment of the chapter deals with the annulment. The author attempts to justify or explain the military government's decision, arguing that multiple legal, security, and procedural issues created a complex situation.

The reasons presented include: court injunctions challenging parts of the electoral process, alleged threats to national security, claims of irregularities and constitutional breaches, fear of widespread unrest if the election was upheld. The author also highlights the intense internal debates within the military hierarchy, noting that opinions were divided and tensions rising. This part of the chapter is particularly significant for review because it reveals the thought process of leadership confronting a national dilemma. However, it also exposes the contradictions and weaknesses that made the annulment difficult to justify publicly.

6. National and International Reactions

The annulment triggered massive outrage across Nigeria and beyond. The chapter examines: pro-democracy protests, strikes and demonstrations, media backlash, international sanctions and diplomatic pressure. Nigeria faced a legitimacy crisis as civil society groups—including labour unions, student bodies, journalists, and human rights organisations—mobilised against the government. The author reflects on the emotional and moral weight of these reactions, acknowledging the deep divide they created between the military leadership and the populace.

7. Attempts to Restore Order: Interim Government and Further Instability

In response to the chaos, the government announced an Interim National Government (ING). This section expounds on: the attempt to manage the fallout from June 12, political negotiations to stabilise the country, the ING's weak legitimacy and continued agitation from pro-democracy forces. The author describes this period as one filled with uncertainty, tension, and declining confidence in government structures.

8. Reflections on Leadership, Mistakes, and Lessons

Toward the end of the chapter, the author adopts a reflective tone. He acknowledges that the June 12 crisis left deep scars on the nation and remains a defining moment in Nigeria's political history.

Key reflections include: the difficulty of leadership during national crises, regret over unresolved tensions, recognition of June 12 as a pivotal historical moment, the complex interplay of political, legal, and military interests and lessons for future leaders about transparency, communication, and public trust. While the narrative attempts to balance responsibility, it is

clear that the author views June 12 as both a turning point and a tragedy—one that continues to shape Nigeria's democratic consciousness.

The significance of Chapter Twelve is crucial not only as part of the book but for understanding Nigeria's political evolution. It provides firsthand insights into the delicate and often explosive process of transition from military to civilian rule. The June 12 saga, as presented here, is a story of hope, conflict, miscalculations, and the heavy burden of statecraft. Through its rich details, personal reflections, and historical analysis, the chapter helps readers grasp the magnitude of decisions that altered the trajectory of Nigeria's democracy. It also offers a valuable platform for scholars, reviewers, and political analysts to engage with the events that remain central to Nigeria's collective memory.

Chapter 13: My Life in Retirement

This chapter reflects on life post-presidency. It showcases Babangida's continued relevance and influence, as well as his enduring commitment to national unity. It offers a profound, introspective, and humanising look into the author's post-presidential years. After a career marked by intense national service, political controversies, and historic reforms, this chapter shifts the narrative from public leadership to personal reflection. It chronicles Ibrahim Babangida's transition into retirement, exploring how he renegotiates his identity, relationships, and routines outside the corridors of power.

The chapter is important because it reveals the emotional and psychological dimensions of life after ruling a nation. It also provides a window into how former leaders adapt to ordinary life while navigating legacy, memory, and public scrutiny.

1. Adjusting to a New Rhythm: Life after Power

The author begins by describing the immediate transition from the fast-paced, high-pressure reality of national leadership to the slower, quieter rhythms of retirement. This shift is presented as both liberating and challenging.

Key themes include: the absence of tight schedules, security briefings, and political emergencies, the relief that comes with freedom from public office, the difficulty of adjusting to a life without constant decision-making, the need to relearn personal space and time. He paints retirement as a moment of rediscovery—learning to live again as a private citizen after decades of public visibility.

2. Coping with Public Perception and Legacy

A significant part of the chapter deals with public opinion. As a former military president associated with major national events, Babangida acknowledges that retirement did not shield him from criticism, scrutiny, or historical debates about his tenure.

He reflects on: how Nigerians interpret his role in major political events, the challenge of separating personal identity from public narratives, the need to emotionally manage criticisms, accusations, and praise, his acceptance that history will judge his leadership from multiple

angles. His reflections reveal a certain emotional maturity and an understanding that leadership inevitably comes with controversy, especially in a complex nation like Nigeria.

3. Family Life and Personal Renewal

Retirement allowed the author to reconnect more deeply with family. After years of demanding national service that kept him physically and emotionally distant at times, he highlights retirement as a period of healing and togetherness.

Important themes include: Spending more time with his children and extended family. Reflecting on his late wife Maryam and the memories they shared. Nurturing bonds that political life had strained. Re-engaging in conversations and relationships once overshadowed by state duties. This section is tender, reflective, and deeply personal. It showcases the author's human side beyond the image of a military statesman.

4. Engagement in Private Business Ventures

Rather than completely withdrawing from national life, Babangida details his involvement in private business and economic activities. These ventures provide him structure, purpose, and an avenue to apply his administrative experience in a more relaxed setting.

He discusses: investments in agriculture, real estate, and consultancy; his philosophy of mentorship and wealth creation, building a quieter but productive post-office career and using business activities as a way to remain intellectually active. The chapter portrays retirement not as an end but as a continuation of service in a different form.

5. Continued National Engagement without Political Office

Although retired, the author explains that he remained a respected voice in national political discussions. This involvement is not through official political positions but through: private counsel to leaders, hosting dignitaries, politicians, and traditional rulers, commenting on national issues when necessary and supporting democratic growth behind the scenes. This paints him as an elder statesman—someone who, while not actively governing, still contributes to Nigeria's political direction.

6. Health, Ageing, and Mindset in Retirement

A reflective portion of the chapter deals with health and aging. The author notes the physical and mental adjustments that come with advancing age, including reduced mobility and a slower pace of life.

He also highlights: the importance of medical care and routine checkups, maintaining mental alertness through reading and discussion, cultivating peace of mind through spirituality and reflection and accepting the realities of aging with grace. This section gives the chapter a contemplative, almost philosophical tone.

7. The Importance of Peace, Solitude, and Reflection

Retirement provides the author with something he lacked throughout his public service years: time for deep thought and inner peace.

He reflects on: meditating on his accomplishments and mistakes, finding peace away from the spotlight, revisiting decisions made during his leadership, evaluating his life's purpose and spiritual journey and embracing nature and solitude as sources of healing. The chapter suggests that retirement became a space of self-understanding, a period where leadership burdens finally gave way to introspection.

8. Interacting with the Public as a Former Leader

Interestingly, the author also discusses what it means to live among the people as a former head of state. Encounters with citizens evoke mixed emotions—gratitude, curiosity, criticism, and respect.

He describes: the warmth he receives from many Nigerians, occasional confrontations from critics, moments of humility as ordinary people share their views, his commitment to listening and engaging constructively. These interactions remind him of the weight of public office and the lasting impact leaders have on national memory.

9. Philosophical Reflections on Life, Service, and Mortality

Toward the conclusion, the author enters a deeply philosophical reflection. He muses on: the meaning of service, the impermanence of power, the inevitability of being judged by history, the importance of leaving behind a legacy of intention, if not perfection, the journey from youth to leadership to quiet adulthood.

This section gives readers a closing glimpse into the emotional and spiritual evolution of a man who once wielded enormous power but must now confront mortality and the quiet truth of life's simplicity.

Chapter Thirteen brings the narrative full circle. After recounting decades of public service, national conflict, political reform, and personal transformation, this chapter reveals the private man behind the public figure. It shows retirement not as a withdrawal from life but as a new phase of reflection, healing, and quiet contribution.

For reviewers, this chapter is essential because it: humanises the author, provides closure to earlier tensions in the book, offers insight into leadership beyond office, demonstrates the emotional intelligence of a former head of state, allows readers to understand the burdens of legacy and the peace of retirement. It is a meditative, honest, and intimate conclusion to a life lived at the height of national responsibility.

Epilogue: Letter to the Next Generation

A statesman's message to youth, this epilogue blends patriotic favour with mentorship. It calls for integrity, service, and belief in the Nigerian project. The Epilogue, titled "Letter to the Next Generation," is one of the most reflective, forward-looking, and morally instructive parts of the book. After chronicling decades of service, leadership, political trials, personal loss, and national transformation, the author closes with a message to Nigeria's youth—a generation he sees as the true inheritors of the country's destiny.

This section is not merely a conclusion; it is a heartfelt testament of lessons learned, warnings informed by history, and hopes grounded in the possibilities of a better Nigeria. In tone, it is both philosophical and advisory, blending wisdom with caution, and encouragement with responsibility.

1. A Call to Understand Nigeria's Past

The author begins by urging the next generation to study Nigeria's history, not as an academic exercise but as a practical guide for shaping the future. He emphasises that many current challenges—political instability, ethnic tensions, governance failures, and economic struggles—are rooted in the unresolved patterns of the past.

He stresses that: Nigeria's journey has been complex, with triumphs and failures. Young people must understand earlier decisions to avoid repeating mistakes. The lessons of colonialism, civil war, military rule, and democratic experimentation must inform future leadership. By grounding the future in the lessons of history, he frames national progress as a conscious, informed project—not an accidental outcome.

2. The Burden and Responsibility of Leadership

A major theme of the epilogue is the weight of leadership. Drawing from his own experiences, the author warns that leadership is not glamour but responsibility—often lonely, morally demanding, and burdened by consequences.

He encourages future leaders to: lead with integrity, balance personal ambition with national duty, prepare for sacrifice and criticism, recognise that every major decision carries long-term consequences, he reminds the youth that leadership in Nigeria requires courage and a strong moral compass, especially in times of national crisis.

3. Embracing National Unity above Ethnic Divisions

The epilogue firmly addresses Nigeria's ethnic and regional divides. The author notes that the country's biggest obstacle is not lack of natural resources or human talent but the persistent fragmentation of national identity.

He urges the next generation to: rise above ethnic, religious, and regional loyalties, build a Nigerian-first mentality, understand that national success depends on cooperation, reject divisive rhetoric from politicians. This section is deeply patriotic, aiming to reorient the mindset of future citizens toward unity as the bedrock of sustainable development.

4. The Importance of Education, Knowledge, and Global Awareness

Education is presented as a transformative force. The author challenges young Nigerians to equip themselves intellectually in order to compete in a rapidly changing world.

He emphasises: the need for digital skills and technological innovation, exposure to global ideas, opportunities, and networks, continuous learning as a survival tool, education as the foundation of leadership, professionalism, and national rebuilding. Here, the epilogue becomes aspirational, urging youth to become globally minded but locally committed.

5. Lessons from His Generation's Mistakes and Achievements

In a rare moment of vulnerability, the author admits that his generation—military rulers, civil servants, politicians, and intellectuals—made mistakes in managing Nigeria's diversity, resources, and political structures.

He reflects that: some reforms succeeded but others failed, some decisions were made under pressure, fear, or incomplete information. His generation tried to stabilise Nigeria but did not always achieve their goals. These reflections serve as cautionary lessons for the next generation to govern with more transparency, patience, and foresight.

6. Hope in the Creative Energy of Young Nigerians

Despite acknowledging Nigeria's challenges, the author expresses deep optimism about the potential of the youth. He sees their resilience, creativity, entrepreneurship, and adaptability as signs that Nigeria's future can be different.

He celebrates: the rise of young innovators in technology, arts, media, and business. A generation that challenges the status quo, increasing awareness and civic engagement, youth who are more connected to global ideas and values. His vision reflects hope—that the new generation will do better than those before them.

7. A Moral Appeal: Integrity, Service, and Patriotism

Toward the end, the epilogue becomes emotionally charged, almost poetic, as the author delivers a moral plea. He calls on the next generation to embrace: honesty in public life, loyalty to the country over personal gain and courage to confront injustice, fairness, compassion, and humility. These values, he suggests, are the most essential ingredients for national recovery and societal progress.

8. The Future Is in Their Hands

The epilogue concludes with a powerful reminder: the destiny of Nigeria now rests with the next generation. His final message emphasises: the inevitability of generational change, the urgency of youth participation in nation-building, the need for young Nigerians to dream boldly and act decisively, the responsibility to reshape Nigeria into a prosperous, peaceful nation. He ends on a note of hope, suggesting that despite difficulties, Nigeria's future remains open, unwritten, and full of possibilities.

The Epilogue serves as a final act of reflection and vision. After recounting his life of service, the author steps back, allowing the spotlight to shine on the youth who will inherit Nigeria. It is both a warning and a blessing—a reminder that history is shaped not just by leaders of the past but by the choices of generations yet to come.

In terms of review: It humanises the author beyond politics. It offers moral and philosophical insights. It ties the entire narrative together. It transforms personal memoir into national guidance. It prepares readers to think critically about Nigeria's future. The epilogue stands as a fitting end to a life story marked by power, controversy, leadership, and hope.

Content and Themes

The memoir traverses Babangida's early life, military training, and ascendancy to political power following the palace coup of 1985. Major chapters cover significant policy decisions, notably the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), economic liberalisation, military institutional reforms, and Nigeria's strategic positioning within the global order. Perhaps the most scrutinised portion of the memoir is Babangida's account of the June 12, 1993, election annulment—widely regarded as a critical turning point in Nigeria's democratic trajectory (Akinrinade & Sesay, 1998).

In recounting these events, Babangida constructs what Ricoeur (1991) identifies as a “narrative identity”—an authored self that simultaneously reveals and conceals. The tone of the memoir is unapologetically strategic: readers are frequently invited to appreciate the constraints and threats that informed the General's decisions, often at the expense of a deeper engagement with opposing perspectives on the long-term consequences of his administration's actions. One of the book's strongest academic contributions lies in its first-person account of pivotal events that have defined Nigeria's post-independence trajectory. The narrative begins with vivid portrayals of childhood, educational sojourns, and socialisation into the military elite. Babangida's entrance into the Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC) in 1962—alongside prominent future national figures—marks the start of a military career that would intertwine with the nation's most consequential epochs. From an academic standpoint, the book's most potent utility lies in its historical specificity and interweaving of personal memory with national transformation. For scholars of African post-colonial leadership, civil-military relations, and development policy, Babangida's insights into military governance during the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era, the creation of new states, and the socio-economic experimentation with institutions like MAMSER and the People's Bank provide first-hand analytical data. The volume is especially commendable for its introspective but unapologetic tone, particularly in addressing controversial decisions such as the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections.

The foreword by General Yakubu Gowon provides an intellectual framework for the book's patriotic and statesman like undertones. Gowon's commentary underscores Babangida's unique blend of martial discipline and political agility—a combination rare among Nigeria's military rulers.

Strengths and Limitations

Nevertheless, the work is not without academic limitations. While rich in descriptive narrative and nationalistic sentiment, the book occasionally skirts deeper ideological self-critique. Key episodes, such as the political transition failures and human rights concerns under his regime, are treated with restraint, perhaps in keeping with the memoir's conciliatory rather than polemical tone. Still, *A Journey in Service* remains a seminal contribution to Nigerian political historiography. It bridges the gap between lived experience and national mythology, providing

a textured understanding of leadership and governance in a fragile multi-ethnic polity. The concluding “Letter to the Next Generation” encapsulates Babangida’s enduring belief in Nigeria’s destiny and the moral imperative of responsible leadership. One of the work’s major strengths is its accessibility and vivid storytelling. The language is clear and reflective, allowing non-specialist readers and scholars alike to engage with Nigeria’s historical trajectory from a primary actor’s viewpoint. Additionally, the memoir contributes to the historiography of military governance in Africa by offering internal perspectives on institutional decision-making and elite power dynamics (Luckham, 1971).

However, the text is equally marked by omissions and rationalisations. For instance, while the SAP is defended as a necessary economic adjustment in line with global neoliberal trends, there is scant acknowledgment of its adverse effects on Nigeria’s working and rural populations (Olukoshi, 1993). Similarly, the justification for annulling the June 12 election is presented in securitised terms, without substantive discussion of democratic principles or public trust.

As with many political memoirs, *A Journey in Service* must be read as a curated narrative—one shaped as much by the desire to inform as to protect legacy. This invites a critical historiographical approach, in which the memoir is considered alongside alternative sources and scholarly critiques.

Conclusion

Babangida’s *A Journey in Service* deserves a central place in African Studies curricula, political science discourse, and historiographical archives. It is a thoughtful reflection on duty, statecraft, and the burden of command in turbulent times. *A Journey in Service* is a vital political autobiography that enriches the documentation of Nigeria’s postcolonial governance. While its historical interpretations require interrogation, the book provides an essential primary source for scholars of African politics, leadership studies, and transitional justice. Its strategic candor and insider insights offer fertile ground for future research, particularly on how power holders attempt to author their place in history. Conclusion

A Journey in Service by Ibrahim B. Babangida is more than a personal memoir—it is a reflective chronicle of Nigeria’s political evolution through the eyes of one of its most influential and controversial leaders. Spanning childhood experiences, military training, civil war participation, political reforms, governance trials, and life in retirement, the book offers a rare insider perspective on the major events that have shaped modern Nigeria. Babangida presents not just his triumphs but also the dilemmas, pressures, and imperfections that accompanied decades of service at the highest levels of national leadership.

What emerges from this work is the portrait of a man shaped by discipline, driven by conviction, and continually confronted by the burdens of leadership in a diverse and often volatile nation. His narrative acknowledges both the successes and the missteps of his era, inviting readers to view governance not as an abstract institution but as a human endeavour filled with difficult choices. Through detailed recollections and thoughtful reflections, Babangida

provides context for decisions that have sparked debate for decades, offering his side of history while leaving room for independent reflection.

The book's significance is further heightened by its epilogue, where he speaks directly to the next generation, urging them to learn from the past, embrace unity, uphold integrity, and lead with courage. This forward-looking message transforms the memoir into a legacy document—one that challenges young Nigerians to build a nation founded on justice, knowledge, and collective purpose. Ultimately, *A Journey in Service* stands as a valuable contribution to Nigeria's historical and political literature. It captures the complexities of leadership, the demands of public duty, and the enduring hope for a better nation. It serves as both a window into the past and a guide for the future, reminding readers that the story of Nigeria is still unfolding—and that every generation has a role to play in shaping it.

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