The mighty wond essay sample

ASSIGN BUSTER

India is the largest democracy in the world. There are many countries in the world that have democratic systems. We have been witnessing elections being held in the country at different levels for over six decades. Municipal and Panchayat elections also do take place. But, can a country be called a democracy only on the basis of the fact that elections are organized regularly? Think over it, because we know that there are some countries where elections do take place, but those are not democracies in true sense. Then the question is what does democracy actually mean? What are the factors which makes a country democratic?. We are confronting a number of challenges. There are many critical problems that need to be solved, so that India marches ahead as a progressive democratic country. The present lesson discusses all these issues and focuses especially on the challenges that our country has been facing.

Objectives Identify major challenges to Indian democracy and appreciate those as potential opportunities to make it successful; recognise the corrective measures for improving the Indian democratic system and assess the efforts; and identify the roles of citizens in a democracy based on experiences of life. UNDERSTANDING DEMOCRACY

Let us begin with understanding the meaning of democracy and the conditions that are essential for its successful functioning. This will help us in appreciating the challenges to Indian democracy. Meaning of Democracy

When we are asked to define democracy, we generally quote a very popular definition: " Democracy is a government of the people, for the people, by the people." Whenever we define democracy, we begin by quoting its meaning

in ancient Greece. We state that the term ' democracy' comes from the Greek word demokratia which means " rule of the people". It was coined from two words: demos that means " people" and Kratos which means " power". That is, in a democracy the power rests with the people. This meaning is based on the experiences of the governments that existed in some of the Greek city-states, notably Athens. Challenges to Indian Democracy Let us discuss the following major challenges and appreciate as potential opportunities for improving the functioning of democracy. Illiteracy among people was a matter of grave concern for successful functioning of democracy in India on the eve of independence and it still continues to be a major challenge.

The level of education of citizens is key to both the successful functioning of democracy and socio-economic development of the country The literacy rate in 1951 was mere 18. 33 per cent and female literacy was negligible, 8. 9 percent. It was, therefore, feared by many that the citizens will not be able to play their roles effectively and exercise meaningfully their right to vote which is an individual's expression of the power of the people. This apprehension, however, has been proved wrong by the Indian electorate over the years. In spite of a substantial number of them being illiterates, in the society. Universal literacy is therefore a must for the successful functioning of Indian democracy. Although according to 2011 Census, the literacy rate has risento 74. 04 per cent, the female literacy rate is still 65. 46 per cent. This means that over one fourth of the country's population is still illiterate while among women nearly one out of three is still illiterate . Poverty

It is the state of denial of opportunities to people to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. Of course, India inherited poverty from the long exploitative British colonial rule, but it continues to be one of the gravest problem. Even now a considerable proportion of Indian population lives below poverty line. The poverty line means an income level below which human beings cannot provide for their basic necessities of food, much less for clothes and shelter. An average of 2400 calories per day and in urban areas an average of 2100 calories per day. The persisting phenomenon of poverty is attributed to many factors, one of which is mass unemployment and underemployment. A large number of people in rural areas do not have regular and adequate work. In urban areas also the number of educated unemployed is very high. Because of all this, poverty continues to be a great challenge to Indian democracy. Gender Discrimination

Women are treated as equals and there is no discrimination against women. Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties as well as the Directive Principles of State Policy make these intensions very clear. But the discrimination against females continues to be a fact of life. By using technology, people are forcing mothers to get the fetus of a female child aborted. The infant mortality rate among girl children is high, as compared to that among boy children. The maternal mortality ratio as per the Sample Registration System 2004-06 is 254 per lakh live births, which is considered very high. Casteism, Communalism&Religeonal Fundamentalism

(a) Casteism: The challenges of casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism are major threats to Indian polity. They weaken the functioning and stability of democratic system. The caste system which

presumably originated in the division of labour in the ancient society, has become a more or less rigid group classification, based on birth. The caste system acts against the roots of democracy. The democratic facilities – like fundamental rights relating to equality, freedom of speech, expression and association, participation in the electoral process, free media and press, and even legislative forums – are misused for maintainingcasteist identity. Casteism has also been contributing towards continuation of socio-economic inequalities. There are enormous inequalities in our society which are posing a serious challenge to Indian democracy (b) Communalism and Religious Fundamentalism:

Communalism and religious fundamentalism have acquired a very dangerous form and alarming proportion in India. They disrupt the pattern of co-existence in our multi-religious society. Communalism is an affront to India's nationalist identity and a tragic set back to its evolving secular culture. As a matter of fact, communalism is an ideology of political allegiance to a religious community as a primary group and its base. It uses one religious community against other communities and perceives other religious communities as its enemies. It is opposed to secularism and even humanism. Religious fundamentalism reinforces communalists in exploiting both religion and politics. In recent past also communalism has proved to be a grave threat to our social and political life on several occasions

Regionalism

Democracy has also been struggling with regionalism which is primarily an outcome of regional disparities and imbalances in development. We all know that India is a plural country with diversities of religions, languages,

communities, tribes and cultures. Anumber of cultural and linguistic groups are concentrated here in certain territorial segments Corruption

Corruption in public life has been a major concern in India. In 2010, India was ranked 87th of 178 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). It is worse than its rank of 84 in 2009. In fact, corruption is rampant in all Walks of life, be it land and property, health, education, commerce and industry, agriculture, transport, police, armed Corruption in office

Above all, corruption in electoral processes and bribing of voters who participate in elections at different levels have now become common experiences. Criminalization of Politics Criminalization of politics in India has become an issue of grave concern. And though the top leaders of all political parties agree that those with criminal record should be debarred from contesting elections, the number of such people continues to increase. Political Violence

Violence has been with us for long, but use of violence for political end is dangerous for the existence of any system. In India we have been witnessing various forms of violence. Communal violence, caste violence and political violence in general have attained serious proportion. Protest becoming Violent

Another aspect of caste violence is the higher castes backlash against the growing awareness and assertion of their rights by the Dalits and lower castes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and backward castes. During

elections, violence is being adopted either to mobilize voters or to prevent them from exercising their right to vote. CORRECTIVE MEASURES

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that democracy and society are facing certain serious challenges. You will definitely agree that there is a need to take corrective measures to offset the impact of these negative developments The government, the political parties and other political and social organizations and above all the citizens must play their respective roles in the fight against these challenges. Certain significant corrective measures are as follows: * Universal Literacy (Education for All)

* Poverty Alleviation
* Elimination of Gender Discrimination
* Removal of Regional Imbalance
* Administrative and Judicial Reforms
And Many More….. " SO Lead a way of life with Democracy Using these measures"………

(i) to make administration accountable and citizen friendly, (ii) to build its capacity for quality governance, (iii) to orient administration for promoting peoples' participation, decentralization and devolution of powers, (iv) to make administrative decisionmaking process transparent, (v) to improve the performance and integrity of the public services, (vi) to reinforce ethics in administration, and (vii) to inculcate readiness for e-governance.

Judicial reform also has been a critical concern since long. Various recommendations have been made on many occasions. The major issues that need consideration in this regard are : (a) Simplification of Rules and

Procedures, (b) Repealing Out-dated Laws, (c) Increase in the Judge Population Ratio, (d) Time-bound filling of Vacant Posts in Judiciary, (d) Transparency in Appointment, Promotion and Transfer of Judges, (e) Judicial Accountability; and (f) Transparency of Court Proceedings. MODULE – 4 Contemporary India: Issues

23. 3. 6 Sustainable Development (Economic, Social, Environmental) The Indian democracy can adequately respond to all the challenges when it moves forward on the path of sustainable development. A model of development without taking into account the basic needs of millions, today as well as in the future, cannot be conducive for survival of democracy. Development has to be human-centred and directed towards improvement of quality of life of all the people. It has to be focused on removal of poverty, ignorance, discrimination, disease and unemployment. The development process has to aim at sustained economic, social and environmental development.

Sustainable development is a pattern of using resources that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations to come. The term was used by the Bruntland Commission (1987) which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that " meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

INTEXT QUESTIONS 23. 3

1. What are the measures being undertaken in India to achieve the goals of

universal literacy, poverty alleviation and removal of gender discrimination? 2. Discuss the steps needed for solving the problem of regional imbalance in India? 3. How can the administrative and judicial reforms be realized in India? 4. What is sustainable development? How will it strengthen Indian democracy? 23. 4 ROLE OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCARCY

As citizens of India, do we really appreciate the role of a citizen in a democracy and why is this role so important? Generally, it is believed that the government rules over people who have to respect the authority and obey it. They are there to be governed. But don't you think that this is not so in a democracy? The people who are citizens in a democratic system like India cannot and ought not remain passive and treat themselves as governed. In fact, a democracy can be successful and vibrant only when citizens imbibe and reflect in their mindset, thinking and behavior the basic values like equality, freedom, secularism, social justice, accountability and respect for all. They have to appreciate the opportunities for their desired roles and play proactive roles to actualize the goals of democracy. SOCIAL SCIENCE MODULE – 4 Challenges to Indian Democracy

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23. 4. 1 Appreciation of Opportunities for Citizen's Role

The opportunities to play the role as a democratic citizen are available in all democracies, but they vary from one democratic system to another. Indian democracy in the modern sense began after a long period of colonial rule.

Although the democratic system started just after independence in 1947, its socio-cultural settings were and still are not in tune with the democratic culture. India is a vast multicultural, multi-lingual truly plural society , which in many respects still carries the characteristics of traditionalism. But at the same time it is trying to absorb the values of modern democracy. Even now many think that the government has to rule and do everything, and if things are not happening in an expected manner, it is only the government which is to be blamed. But as you know, the democratic government in our country is run by the representatives chosen by us. In that sense, every citizen is responsible for how the governments function at different levels, national, state and local. And hence, every citizen has to play a critical role and use every opportunity for doing so. Are we Indian citizens doing so? Let us consider. Major opportunities for roles of citizens may be as follows:

(a) Participation

The key role of citizens in a democracy is to participate in public life. The most commonly observed opportunity of participation is exercising the right to vote during elections. And in order to vote wisely it is necessary that each citizen listens to and knows the views of different parties and candidates, and then make his or her own decision on whom to vote for. But as is made public by the Election Commission of India after every election, on an average almost 50 per cent citizens do not vote. Definitely very few are involved in campaigning for a political party or candidate or in debates on public issues.

Participation in a democratic polity, however, is not confined simply to participation in elections. A vital form of participation comes through

membership of political parties and more importantly, active membership in independent non-governmental organizations, that are known as " civil society organizations." These organizations represent a variety of interests of different groups such as women, students, farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers, human rights activists. Such organizations and people's movements help to bring awareness about different issues among the people.

(b) Making the System Accountable
Participation in the political process is not enough. Citizens have to make the democratic system responsive and responsible. The constitution makes the executive responsible to the legislature, but citizens are needed to ensure that the Parliamentarians, Members of State Legislatures and their representatives in Panchayati Raj and Municipal Institutions are accountable. The instruments created by Right to Information Act, 2005 in our country enable citizens to play their role effectively. Citizens have an obligation to become informed about public issues, to watch carefully how theirMODULE – 4 Contemporary India: Issues

Notes political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests. When citizens find the government is not living up to its promises, they can point it out through media, make recommendations and demands to the government. If the government still fails to fulfill promises, citizens may protest , carry out peaceful satyagraha, civil disobedience or non-cooperation campaigns to make the government accountable.

(c) Fulfilling Obligations

We should realize that citizenship is more than voting or making the system accountable. Many people tend to regard democracy as a system where literally everything is allowed. And every person has the freedom to do whatever one desires. This often leads to a complete chaos that devastates the order of the society rather than improving it. In that way it leads to the opposite effects of the aims of democracy. A citizen has to accept that freedom is never absolute. If you have a right to do certain things, you have also the responsibility to ensure that your actions do not infringe upon the rights of others.

23. 5 PROACTIVE ROLE TO ACTUALIZE CORRECTIVE

MEASURES

If democracy is to work, citizens must not only participate and exercise their rights. In fact, the corrective measures to meet the challenges faced by Indian democracy, as discussed above, can be actualized only when citizens play a proactive role. They must respect the law and reject violence. Every citizen must respect the rights of his or her fellow citizens, and their dignity as human beings. No one should denounce a political opponent as evil, just because they have different views. People should question the decisions of the government, but not reject the government's authority. Every group has the right to practice its culture and to have some control over its own affairs, but each group should accept that it is a part of a plural society and democratic state.

When you express your opinion, you should also listen to the views of other people, even people you disagree with. Everyone has a right to be heard.

When you make demands, you should understand that in a democracy, it is impossible for everyone to achieve everything they want. Democracy requires mutual cooperation. Groups with different interests and opinions must be willing to sit down with one another and negotiate. If one group is always excluded and fails to be heard, it may turn against democracy in anger and frustration. Everyone who is willing to participate peacefully and respect the rights of others should have some say in the way the country is governed.

It is also important that citizens must assert their opinion, as in a democracy not asserting your opinion also means that you are agreeing with the decision which you consider improper. You have seen in Activity 23. 2, how members of Sunil's family did not assert their opinion against the decision of the head of the family. SOCIAL SCIENCE MODULE – 4 Challenges to Indian Democracy

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ACTIVITY 23. 5

Now that you have tried to understand the kind of roles a democratic citizen plays, you will find it interesting to explore how democratic you yourself are? Below are given some statements in a table, write whether the statements are write or wrong.

S. No. Statement Right/Wrong

1. Right To Information Act, 2005 is an effective tool to be used by the citizens to make the government accountable.

2. Everyone in your society is treated equal, whether he/she belongs to any economic or social strata.

3. In your family, women and girls are not always considered equal to men and boys.

4. You believe that you should never act in a way that affects the rights of others.

5. The system of reservations for females , members of to SCs/STs and minorities is not good for Indian democracy.

Democracy is a form of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. But it is defined not only in the political context, but also in social context or even in relation to self. A system can be termed as a genuine and comprehensive democracy, a successfully functioning democracy, only when it fulfils certain political, social and economic conditions.

Indian Democracy over the years has been able to articulate many of these essential conditions. But it is confronting a number of challenges that at times bring out the distortions which have crept in and also indicate the possible threats to its future. Illiteracy, social and economic inequality, poverty, gender discrimination, casteism, communalism and religious fundamentalism, regionalism, corruption, criminalization, political violence and militancy are major challenges that need to be addressed.

The corrective measures that are needed to meet the challenges to Indian democracy are focused around the issues and concerns like universal literacy i. e. education for all, poverty alleviation, elimination of gender discrimination, removal of regional imbalances, administrative and judicial reforms and sustained economic, social and environmental development.

However, Indian democracy can be successful and vibrant only when its citizens imbibe and reflect in their behavior the basic democratic values like equality, freedom, social justice, accountability and respect for all. Their mindset, thinking and behavior are expected to be in tune with the essential conditions of democracy. They have to appreciate the opportunities for their desired roles like participation, making the system accountable and fulfilling obligations and playing proactive roles to actualise the goals of democracy.

TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. Explain the meaning of democracy. Why do you think that the meaning of democracy cannot be comprehensive, if it is defined only in political context?

2. What are the essential conditions that make a system truly democratic? 3. What are the major challenges to Indian democracy? Explain how the challenges are potential opportunities to make it an effective democratic system. SOCIAL SCIENCE MODULE – 4 Challenges to Indian Democracy

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4. Critically examine the trends of protest and violence in India. Why do protests turn in to violent movements?

5. What are the significant corrective measures that are required to be taken to meet the challenges to Indian democracy?

6. Discuss the expected roles of citizens in Indian democracy especially in the context of the experiences of Indian society and government. 7. What are the qualities that need to be reflected in an individual to be an Indian citizen in true sense?

8. Write some qualities of a good citizen.

ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

23. 1

1. Democracy is defined as a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. In essence, democracy is a form of government which is run by the elected representatives of the people. 2. The definition of democracy is incomplete unless it is defined in social and individual contexts as well. In the present age, it means more than a mere form of government. In its comprehensive form, democracy means, (i) a form of government, (ii) a type of state, (iii) a pattern of social system, (iv) a design of economic order, and (v) a way of life and culture. Therefore, when we say Indian democracy, we mean not only that its political institutions and processes are democratic but also that the Indian society and every Indian citizen is democratic, reflecting basic democratic values of equality, liberty, fraternity, secularism and justice in social environment and individual behavior.

3. A system can be termed as a genuine democracy only when it fulfils (a) political conditions as follows: (i) having a Constitution that vests supreme power in the people and protects fundamental rights, such as equality, liberty of thought and expression, belief, movement, communication and

association; (ii) having universal adult franchise as the basis of electing representatives; and (iii) having a responsible government in which the executive is answerable to the legislature and the legislature to the people; and (b) social and economic conditions as follows:(i) the system ensuring social development that is in tune with democratic values and norms reflecting equality of social status, social security and social welfare; and (ii) the system facilitating a situation where the fruits of economic development reach all and especially the poor and deprived sections of the society.

MODULE – 4

1. Illiteracy, inequality and poverty adversely affect the functioning of Indian democracy. (i) Illiterate citizens are not able to play their roles effectively and exercise meaningfully their right to vote which is an individual expression of the power of the people. Literacy enables citizens to be aware of various issues, problems, demands, and interests in the country, be conscious of the principles of liberty and equality of all and ensure that the representatives elected by them truly represent all the interests in the society. (ii) Poverty is perhaps the greatest bane of democracy. It is the root cause of all kinds of deprivations and inequalities and is the state of denial of opportunities to people to lead a healthy and fulfilling life.

2. Yes, the popular entertainment channels and films generally depict gender discrimination. In fact, the serials on television channels are reinforcing the prevailing patterns of family relations showing females playing traditional roles of mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, mothers-in-laws and daughters-in-laws. It is true that a few of them question the traditional roles, but those also somehow reflect gender discrimination.

3. Caste System: The most detrimental and inhuman example of the prevailing caste system is the practice of untouchability which is continuing in spite of the constitutional ban imposed on it. The Dalits still bear the brunt of discrimination and deprivation. This has led to segregation of so called low castes, depriving them of education and other social benefits. The second example relates to politicisation of caste system. Casteism has become notorious as a strategy of exploitation of caste consciousness for narrow political gains. The caste system acts against the roots of democracy. Communalism: It disrupts quite often the smooth process of co-existence in a multi-religious Indian society. Communal riots happening in the country since independence have been dangerous for peace and order.

Secondly the misuse of religion by fundamentalist people during elections and even in other situations has always been proved to be counterproductive. 4. Although development process in the country has been aimed at growth and development of all regions, the regional disparities and imbalances continue to exist. Existence and continuation of regional inequalities in terms of differences in per capita income, literacy rates, state of health and educational infrastructure and services, population situation and levels of industrial and agricultural development both among States and within a State create a feeling of neglect, deprivation and discrimination.

5. The influence of muscle power in Indian politics has been a fact of life for a long time. Almost all parties take the help of criminal elements to dominate the election scene in India. Earlier in the 1960's, the criminal was content by covertly helping the politician win the election so that he could in turn get

protection from him. SOCIAL SCIENCE MODULE – 4 Challenges to Indian Democracy

But the roles have now been reversed. It is the politician who seeks protection from criminals.

6. One of the major reasons of increase of political violence has been the emergence of serious conflict of interests between higher and middle castes as an outcome of agricultural development, abolition of zamindari system, and developments like green revolution and white revolution. These have led to aggressive competition for political power which many a time leads to violence. Another reason is the backlash of higher castes against the growing awareness and assertion of their rights by the lower castes, particularly the Scheduled Castes and lowest backward castes. Moreover, violence has been associated with demands for separate States, reorganization of States or adjustment of State boundaries. As we observe, the Telangana Movement in Andhra Pradesh often turns violent. Violence has also been used quite frequently during industrial strikes, farmers' movement, students' agitations, and a number of other civil disobedience campaigns.

23. 3

1. To attain the goal of universal literacy a nation-wide programme known as Saakshar Bharat is being implemented. Moreover, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is a flagship programme for universalisation of elementary education for children between 6-14 years of age. Besides, Parliament of India in 2009 passed Right to Education Act through which education has become a fundamental right of all children of age group 6-14 years. For poverty alleviation, two kinds of programmes are being implemeted: (i) Programmes

to lift beneficiaries above poverty line by providing them with productive assets or skills or both so that they can employ themselves usefully and earn greater income, and (ii) Programmes to provide temporary wage employment for the poor and the landless.

Public Distribution System contributes towards meeting people's basic food needs, the Integrated Rural Development Programme provides rural households below the poverty line with credit to purchase income-generating assets, The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, provides more than 700 million person days of work a year. Moreover, TRYSEM (Training Rural Youth for Self Employment) was started to provide technical skills to the rural youth and to help them to get employment. 2. Besides the State-specific efforts for reducing intra-State regional disparities, a number of Centrally Sponsored Programmes have been in operation for the last two to three decades for taking care of specific aspects of backwardness of such regions. Some of the major programmes are: (i) the Tribal Development Programme, (ii) the Hill Area Development Programme, (iii) the Border Area Development Programme, (iv) the Western Ghat Development Programme, (v) the Drought Prone Area Programme and (vi) Desert Development Programme. MODULE – 4 Contemporary India: Issues

3. For administrative reforms, the following recommendations need to be implemented: (i) to make administration accountable and citizen friendly, (ii) to build its capacity for quality governance, (iii) to orient administration for promoting peoples' participation, decentralization and devolution of powers, (iv) to make administrative decision-making process transparent, (v) to

improve the performance and integrity of the public services, (vi) to reinforce ethics in administration, and (vii) to inculcate readiness for e-governance.

For judicial reforms, the steps that are to be taken are as follows: (a) Simplification of Rules and Procedures, (b) Repealing Out-dated Laws, (c) Increase in the Judge Population Ratio, (d) Time-bound filling of Vacant Posts in Judiciary, (d) Transparency in Appointment, Promotion and Transfer of Judges, (e) Judicial Accountability, and (f) Transparency of Court Proceedings.

4. Sustainable development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations to come. When the development is human-centred and directed towards improvement of quality of life of all the people, it has to be focused on removal of poverty, ignorance, discrimination, disease and unemployment. All these will strengthen Indian democracy. 23. 4

1. Participation in a democratic polity is not confined simply to participation in elections. A vital form of participation comes through membership of political parties and more importantly, active membership in independent non-governmental organizations, that are known as " civil society." These organizations represent a variety of interests of different groups: women, students, farmers, workers, doctors, teachers, business owners, religious believers and human rights activists. 2. Citizens have to make the democratic system responsive and responsible. They are needed to ensure that the Parliamentarians, Members of State Legislatures and their representatives in Panchayati Raj and Municipal Institutions are accountable.

The instruments created by Right to Information Act, 2005 in our country enable citizens to play their role effectively. Citizens must watch carefully how their political leaders and representatives use their powers, and to express their own opinions and interests.