UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

There can be no social justice without economic prosperity but economic prosperity without social justice is meaningless

बिना आर्थिक समृद्धि के
सामाजिक न्याय नहीं हो सकता , किन्तु बिना सामाजिक न्याय के आर्थिक समृद्धि निरर्थक है।

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Answer Hint

Meaning of social justice and economic prosperity; relationship between economic growth and distributive justice; poverty and inequality; inclusive development; education and healthcare; employment and livelihood security; constitutional provisions for social justice; welfare schemes and affirmative action; challenges of unequal growth; sustainable and equitable development.

Model Answer

Introduction
Economic prosperity and social justice are two fundamental pillars of a progressive society. Economic prosperity refers to the expansion of productive capacity, income, employment and material well-being. Social justice involves ensuring fairness, equal dignity, equal opportunities and protection against discrimination. Although

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economic growth creates resources necessary for improving people's lives, its benefits may remain concentrated among a privileged few unless supported by equitable institutions and inclusive policies.

The statement highlights a two-way relationship: social justice requires a sufficiently strong economic foundation, while economic prosperity acquires genuine meaning only when it improves the lives of all sections of society. Development must therefore be measured not merely by the size of an economy but also by the dignity, opportunities and well-being it provides to its people.

Understanding the Relationship Between Economic Prosperity and Social Justice

1. Economic prosperity as a foundation for social justice

A prosperous economy generates resources that governments can invest in education, healthcare, housing, sanitation, social security and infrastructure. It can create employment opportunities, improve wages and expand access to essential services.

For example, greater tax revenues can enable governments to strengthen public hospitals, improve schools and provide social protection to vulnerable households.

Without adequate economic resources, the capacity to finance these programmes becomes constrained. Persistent poverty can force families to prioritise immediate survival over education, healthcare and long-term development.

However, economic growth alone does not guarantee justice. Its benefits depend on the quality of governance, public spending and the distribution of opportunities.

2. Social justice as the purpose of economic prosperity

Economic growth is a means to improve human welfare, not an end in itself. If rising national income coexists with hunger, unemployment, discrimination and unequal access to basic services, prosperity remains incomplete.

Social justice ensures that economic opportunities are not restricted by caste, gender, disability, region or family background. It also requires institutions that protect workers, uphold rights and provide fair access to public resources.

Thus, social justice gives economic prosperity its human purpose by ensuring that development translates into improved capabilities and a dignified life.

Economic Growth Without Social Justice: An Incomplete Achievement

1. Rising inequality

Economic growth may disproportionately benefit individuals who already possess capital, advanced skills and access to influential networks. When wealth becomes concentrated, the benefits of development may not reach poorer households.

Persistent inequality can weaken social mobility, reduce trust in institutions and create resentment.

2. Poverty amid aggregate prosperity

A country may record strong economic growth while substantial sections of its population struggle with inadequate nutrition, poor housing and insecure employment.

This demonstrates why average income or GDP growth cannot fully capture people's lived experiences. Development must also consider poverty reduction, access to essential services and the distribution of economic gains.

3. Exclusion of vulnerable groups

Historical discrimination and structural barriers can prevent women, persons with disabilities, marginalised communities and disadvantaged regions from participating equally in economic activity.

When these barriers persist, the economy loses human potential and society fails to uphold equal dignity.

4. Exploitative working conditions

Economic expansion based on unsafe workplaces, inadequate wages or insecure employment cannot be considered fully just. Workers must have reasonable protection, safe working conditions and opportunities to improve their livelihoods.

5. Environmental injustice

Economic activities may generate profits while imposing pollution, displacement and health costs on poorer communities. Sustainable prosperity must account for these unequal burdens and protect the

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interests of future generations.

Why Social Justice Is Essential for Sustainable Economic Prosperity

1. Human capital development

Equal access to education, nutrition and healthcare improves productivity and enables individuals to contribute to the economy. Healthy and educated citizens are better equipped to innovate, adapt to technological change and undertake skilled employment.

2. Wider participation in economic activity

When women and disadvantaged communities have access to education, credit, property rights and employment, the productive capacity of the economy expands.

Removing barriers to participation is therefore not merely a welfare measure; it is also an economic necessity.

3. Social stability and institutional trust

Extreme inequality can generate alienation, conflict and distrust. Fair institutions and accessible public services strengthen social cohesion and create a more stable environment for investment and development.

4. Intergenerational mobility

Children from disadvantaged families often face barriers that limit their future opportunities. Public education, healthcare, nutrition and social protection can reduce the transmission of poverty across generations.

5. Resilience during crises

Inclusive social protection can help households withstand economic downturns, pandemics and natural disasters. When people have basic security, they are better able to recover and participate in economic reconstruction.

Constitutional Vision of India

The Indian Constitution seeks to combine economic development with social, economic and political justice.

- **Preamble:** It commits India to securing justice—social, economic and political—and equality of status and opportunity.
- **Article 14:** Guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws.

- **Article 15:** Prohibits specified forms of discrimination and permits constitutionally authorised special provisions for disadvantaged groups.
- **Article 16:** Provides equality of opportunity in public employment, subject to constitutional provisions for reservation.
- **Article 17:** Abolishes untouchability.
- **Article 21:** Protects life and personal liberty, with judicial interpretation giving the right a broader human-dignity dimension.
- **Article 38:** Directs the State to promote a social order informed by justice and to minimise inequalities.
- **Article 39:** Includes principles concerning adequate livelihoods, distribution of material resources for the common good and protection of workers.
- **Article 41:** Addresses the right to work, education and public assistance within the limits of the State's economic capacity.
- **Article 46:** Directs the State to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker sections, particularly Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Together, these provisions reflect the constitutional understanding that political democracy must be supported by social and economic democracy.

Indian Initiatives Linking Prosperity with Social Justice

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)

MGNREGA provides a statutory framework for demanding wage employment in rural areas, subject to the Act's provisions. It supports rural livelihoods, creates community assets and provides a degree of income security.

2. National Food Security Act, 2013

The Act provides a legal framework for subsidised food grains to eligible households. Food security supports nutrition, protects vulnerable families and enables them to allocate limited resources to other essential needs.

3. Ayushman Bharat and public healthcare

Ayushman Bharat includes initiatives intended to strengthen primary healthcare and provide health coverage to eligible beneficiaries. Reducing the financial burden of illness helps prevent medical expenses from pushing households into poverty.

4. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

Financial inclusion through bank accounts can improve access to formal banking and facilitate the delivery of government benefits. Its impact depends on effective access, financial literacy and the availability of suitable services.

5. Direct Benefit Transfer

Direct transfers can improve the traceability and delivery of eligible benefits. However, accurate beneficiary identification, reliable payment systems and accessible grievance redressal remain essential.

6. Education and affirmative action

Public education, scholarships and constitutionally permitted reservation policies seek to address barriers arising from historical disadvantage and unequal access to opportunity.

These initiatives demonstrate the role of public policy in translating economic resources into social benefits. Their effectiveness depends on implementation, accountability, adequate funding and continuous evaluation.

Challenges in Achieving Both Economic Prosperity and Social Justice

1. Unequal distribution of growth

Growth may be concentrated in specific sectors, regions or groups, leaving others with limited access to productive employment and economic opportunities.

2. Unemployment and informal work

Many workers face irregular incomes, inadequate social security and limited bargaining power. Economic growth that fails to generate sufficient decent employment cannot adequately reduce deprivation.

3. Regional disparities

Differences in infrastructure, educational opportunities and industrial development can widen the gap between advanced and less-developed regions.

4. Gender inequality

Unequal unpaid care responsibilities, workplace discrimination and barriers to property ownership or credit can restrict women's economic participation.

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5. Implementation gaps

Leakages, administrative delays, corruption and inadequate local capacity can weaken welfare programmes and prevent resources from reaching intended beneficiaries.

6. Fiscal constraints

Governments must balance expenditure on social services with infrastructure, security and other public priorities. Poorly designed programmes can strain public finances, while insufficient social investment can undermine long-term productivity.

7. Technological disruption

Automation and artificial intelligence may increase productivity but also displace some workers. Without reskilling, social protection and access to new opportunities, technological progress may intensify inequality.

Way Forward: Towards Inclusive and Just Prosperity

1. Promote employment-intensive growth

Policies should encourage labour-intensive manufacturing, small enterprises, modern agriculture, tourism and services capable of generating productive employment.

2. Invest in human development

Quality public education, primary healthcare, nutrition and skill development should be treated as productive investments rather than merely expenditure.

3. Strengthen social protection

Effective pensions, employment support, maternity benefits, disability assistance and accessible healthcare can protect vulnerable households against economic shocks.

4. Improve progressive and efficient taxation

A fair and effective tax system can mobilise resources for public services while reducing opportunities for tax evasion and excessive concentration of economic advantages.

5. Empower women and marginalised communities

Equal access to education, property, credit, technology and employment can broaden participation in economic development.

6. Reduce regional inequalities

Targeted investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity, education and healthcare can help disadvantaged regions develop their economic potential.

7. Improve governance and accountability

Transparent beneficiary selection, social audits, timely grievance redressal and evidence-based evaluation can improve the delivery of public programmes.

8. Integrate sustainability with justice

Economic policies must protect natural resources, reduce pollution and ensure that the costs of environmental degradation do not fall disproportionately on vulnerable communities.

Conclusion

Economic prosperity and social justice are not competing objectives; they are mutually reinforcing requirements of meaningful development. Prosperity provides the resources needed to expand human capabilities, while social justice ensures that these resources create opportunities, dignity and security for all.

A society cannot achieve lasting prosperity by excluding large sections of its population, nor can it sustain social justice without a productive economic foundation. India's developmental vision must therefore move beyond aggregate growth towards inclusive, employment-generating and environmentally sustainable progress. The true measure of an economy is not simply how much wealth it produces, but how effectively that wealth improves the lives of its people.

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