UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

Need brings greed, if greed increases it spoils breed

आवश्यकता लोभ की जननी है तथा लोभ

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Answer Hint

Human needs and desires, greed and materialism, consumerism, ethical values, environmental degradation, corruption, inequality, social relationships, sustainable development, Gandhian philosophy, intergenerational justice, moderation and contentment.

Model Answer

Introduction

Human civilisation has progressed through the fulfilment of basic needs and the pursuit of higher aspirations. The desire for food, shelter, security, knowledge and a better quality of life has encouraged agriculture, scientific discovery, trade and technological innovation. However, when legitimate needs transform into an uncontrolled desire to accumulate wealth, power and possessions, ambition can become greed. Greed, unlike need, has no natural point of satisfaction; it continually demands more, often at the expense of others.

The statement “Need brings greed, if greed increases it spoils breed” highlights the danger of allowing material desires to dominate human values. The word breed can be understood as future generations, the quality of human character and the continuity of society. Excessive greed can therefore damage individual morality, social relationships, economic fairness and the natural environment on which future generations depend. The challenge is not to eliminate human ambition but to distinguish constructive aspiration from destructive excess.

Understanding the Relationship Between Need and Greed

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1. Need as a Foundation of Human Progress

Needs arise from the requirements of survival, dignity and development. Food, clothing, housing, healthcare, education and security are essential for a meaningful life. The pursuit of these necessities motivates people to work, innovate and improve their circumstances.

For example, a farmer seeking better irrigation methods or an entrepreneur developing affordable medical technology is responding to genuine needs. Such efforts can benefit both individuals and society.

Therefore, the desire to improve one's condition is not inherently harmful. It becomes problematic when the pursuit of personal benefit disregards fairness, responsibility and the legitimate interests of others.

2. The Transformation of Need into Greed

Greed emerges when accumulation becomes an end in itself rather than a means of achieving well-being. A person may initially seek wealth for security, but gradually become obsessed with acquiring more, even after essential needs have been met.

Unlike need, greed is sustained by comparison, insecurity and the desire for superiority. There is always someone richer, more influential or more powerful against whom an individual may measure success.

This endless competition can create a cycle in which material accumulation increases without producing corresponding satisfaction. The individual may possess considerable wealth yet remain dissatisfied because the standard of success continually shifts.

3. Why Excessive Greed Is Destructive

Greed becomes socially harmful when people pursue private advantage through exploitation, dishonesty, corruption or the excessive use of shared resources.

It can undermine trust, intensify inequality and weaken institutions. At the environmental level, it may encourage the extraction of natural resources beyond sustainable limits.

Thus, the central issue is not wealth itself but the methods of acquiring it, the purposes for which it is used and the consequences it produces.

Individual Consequences of Greed

1. Loss of Ethical Values

When the desire for personal gain becomes supreme, honesty, compassion and integrity may be treated as obstacles rather than principles.

A person may justify cheating, bribery or deception by arguing that success requires the use of every available opportunity. Over time, such reasoning can normalise unethical conduct and weaken the individual's moral judgement.

The pursuit of wealth then ceases to be an instrument of well-being and becomes a source of moral compromise.

2. Psychological Dissatisfaction

Greed often creates dependence on external measures of success, such as income, luxury possessions, status and social recognition. Because these measures encourage continuous comparison, satisfaction becomes temporary.

Contentment, by contrast, allows individuals to appreciate what they have while continuing to improve their lives. It does not prohibit ambition; it prevents ambition from becoming an endless source of dissatisfaction.

A balanced approach enables individuals to pursue excellence without sacrificing mental peace and meaningful relationships.

3. Neglect of Relationships

Excessive material ambition can weaken family and social relationships when work, money or status consistently takes priority over care and companionship.

Children may receive expensive possessions but insufficient emotional attention. Friendships may become transactional, while professional relationships may be valued only for their usefulness.

Human well-being depends on trust, affection and belonging—qualities that cannot be acquired simply through financial accumulation.

Social and Economic Consequences of Greed

1. Corruption and Institutional Decline

Greed can motivate bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion, fraud and the misuse of public authority. When officials or business leaders prioritise private gain over public responsibility, public resources are diverted from essential services.

Corruption can reduce the quality of healthcare, education, infrastructure and welfare programmes. It also weakens public trust and undermines the principle that institutions should serve the common good.

Transparent administration, independent oversight, effective enforcement and ethical leadership are essential to prevent private interests from dominating public decisions.

2. Rising Economic Inequality

The accumulation of wealth is not automatically harmful. Investment, entrepreneurship and productive innovation can generate employment and raise living standards.

However, when economic power is concentrated through exploitation, unfair practices or privileged access to opportunities, the gap between rich and poor can widen.

Excessive inequality can restrict access to quality education, healthcare, housing and productive assets. It may also reduce social mobility and create resentment between different sections of society.

A fair economy must therefore encourage enterprise while ensuring that workers receive fair treatment, competition remains healthy and vulnerable groups have access to basic opportunities.

3. Exploitation of Labour

When profit maximisation becomes the sole objective, employers may neglect workplace safety, fair wages, reasonable working hours and workers' dignity.

Exploitative practices can produce short-term gains but damage employee health, productivity and social stability. A responsible enterprise recognises that workers are partners in production rather than disposable inputs.

Ethical business practices demonstrate that profitability and social responsibility need not be contradictory.

4. Consumerism and Artificial Needs

Modern advertising and social media can encourage people to equate happiness with consumption. Products that were once considered luxuries may be presented as necessities for social acceptance.

This can lead to unnecessary borrowing, wasteful spending and constant dissatisfaction. Individuals may purchase goods not because they need them but because they wish to imitate lifestyles or display status.

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Responsible consumption requires distinguishing genuine needs from desires manufactured by comparison and commercial pressure.

Environmental Consequences: Greed and the Destruction of Natural Resources

1. Overexploitation of Nature

Excessive demand for minerals, timber, fossil fuels, land and water can result in deforestation, soil degradation, biodiversity loss and pollution.

When short-term commercial gains dominate environmental considerations, ecosystems may be damaged beyond their capacity to recover. The consequences include declining agricultural productivity, water scarcity and greater vulnerability to environmental hazards.

Natural resources must therefore be used with regard to ecological limits and the needs of future generations.

2. Climate Change

The expansion of fossil-fuel-intensive production and consumption has contributed significantly to rising greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change affects agriculture, water availability, coastal settlements and human health.

Not all economic growth is environmentally destructive, and poverty reduction remains an essential development objective. The problem arises when growth depends on wasteful consumption and ignores environmental costs.

A transition towards renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport and responsible production can reconcile development aspirations with ecological protection.

3. Intergenerational Injustice

The consequences of greed extend beyond the present generation. Excessive resource extraction, pollution and the destruction of natural habitats can leave future generations with fewer opportunities and greater environmental risks.

Intergenerational justice requires current societies to preserve the ecological and institutional foundations of human well-being.

A society that consumes its natural inheritance without considering future needs may achieve temporary prosperity while undermining its long-term survival.

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Historical and Contemporary Illustrations

1. Financial Scandals and Corporate Fraud

Financial frauds illustrate how greed can override legal and ethical responsibilities. When executives manipulate accounts, mislead investors or misuse entrusted funds, they may secure temporary personal benefits while causing widespread financial losses.

Such episodes demonstrate the importance of corporate governance, transparency and accountability.

2. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008

The global financial crisis exposed serious weaknesses in parts of the financial system, including excessive risk-taking, irresponsible lending and incentives that rewarded short-term gains. These practices contributed to a crisis with severe consequences for employment, housing and economic stability.

The crisis illustrates how private incentives, when poorly regulated and disconnected from broader responsibilities, can generate costs for society as a whole.

3. Environmental Degradation

Unregulated mining, illegal logging and destructive industrial practices show how the pursuit of immediate profit can undermine ecological systems and local livelihoods.

The long-term costs may include damaged land, polluted water, health problems and the loss of traditional occupations. These consequences reveal why economic decisions must account for social and environmental externalities.

4. Gandhian Philosophy

Mahatma Gandhi's principle that the Earth provides enough to satisfy everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed, captures the ethical essence of the topic.

His emphasis on simplicity, self-restraint and trusteeship challenged the idea that wealth should be accumulated without regard to social responsibility. The trusteeship principle suggests that those possessing substantial resources should use them in ways that also serve society.

Although modern economies require investment and productive enterprise, Gandhian thought remains relevant in encouraging moderation, equitable opportunity and responsible ownership.

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Distinguishing Healthy Ambition from Destructive Greed

It is important not to condemn every desire for wealth, achievement or progress. Human aspirations have contributed to scientific discoveries, medical advances, entrepreneurship and improvements in living standards.

The distinction lies in the purpose and methods of pursuing these aspirations.

Healthy ambition	Destructive greed
Seeks improvement through productive effort	Seeks accumulation without a meaningful limit
Respects laws, fairness and human dignity	Justifies exploitation and unethical conduct
Creates value for society	Concentrates benefits while shifting costs to others
Accepts responsibility for consequences	Ignores social and environmental damage
Recognises the value of contentment	Depends on endless comparison and acquisition

A society should encourage innovation and enterprise while discouraging practices that damage public welfare. The goal is not to suppress aspiration but to guide it towards socially beneficial outcomes.

The Way Forward: Building a Culture of Responsible Aspiration

1. Value-Based Education

Educational institutions should cultivate honesty, empathy, cooperation and respect for public resources. Ethical reasoning should accompany professional and technical learning so that success is evaluated through both achievement and responsibility.

2. Ethical Leadership

Political, administrative and corporate leaders must demonstrate integrity and accountability. Strong conflict-of-interest rules, transparent procurement, independent audits and effective anti-corruption mechanisms can reduce opportunities for personal enrichment at public expense.

3. Fair Economic Institutions

Governments should promote fair competition, protect workers, prevent fraudulent practices and ensure access to essential services. Social protection and equitable opportunities can reduce the insecurity that encourages harmful competition.

4. Sustainable Consumption and Production

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Individuals and businesses should reduce unnecessary waste, improve resource efficiency and adopt environmentally responsible practices. Circular-economy approaches, recycling and renewable energy can help reduce pressure on natural resources.

5. Personal Contentment and Social Responsibility

Individuals can practise mindful consumption, financial discipline and gratitude. Wealth can be used not only for personal security but also for education, community development, philanthropy and productive investment.

6. Strong Accountability Mechanisms

Independent institutions, responsible journalism and informed citizens can expose corruption and question the misuse of power. Accountability helps ensure that private interests do not override the public good.

Conclusion

The statement “Need brings greed, if greed increases it spoils breed” warns against the transformation of legitimate aspirations into uncontrolled accumulation. Human needs inspire progress, but greed can corrupt individual character, weaken institutions, deepen inequality and destroy the natural foundations of future prosperity.

The solution is not to reject wealth creation or ambition. It is to ensure that economic success remains guided by ethical values, social responsibility and ecological sustainability. A prosperous society must provide people with the means to live with dignity while preventing the pursuit of excess from undermining the welfare of others.

Ultimately, the quality of a civilisation is measured not only by what it produces or accumulates but also by how it treats people, distributes opportunities and protects the future. When ambition is guided by integrity and prosperity is balanced with compassion, human progress becomes sustainable. **Need can inspire development, but only restraint, responsibility and justice can prevent greed from destroying the very society that progress is meant to serve.**