UPSC MAINS · ANSWER PRACTICE

Essay · Essay

A society that has more justice is a society that

needs less charity.

जिस समाज में अधिक न्याय होता है , उस समाज को दान की कम आवश्यकता

होती है।

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SUBJECT

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MARKS

125

WORD LIMIT

~1200 words

Answer Hint

Charity addresses immediate suffering, whereas justice addresses the structural causes that produce deprivation. Examine the relationship between equality, rights, opportunity, welfare and dignity; argue that a just society reduces dependence through fair institutions, while charity remains valuable during emergencies and for vulnerable groups. The ideal is not to eliminate compassion but to transform charity-dependent relationships into rights-based social protection.

Model Answer

Introduction

Charity is an expression of compassion in which individuals or institutions voluntarily provide assistance to those in need. Justice, however, concerns the fair distribution of rights, opportunities, resources and responsibilities within society. Charity may alleviate the consequences of deprivation, whereas justice seeks to remove the conditions that create deprivation. Hence, the more just a society becomes, the less dependent vulnerable people are likely to be on charity.

Charity as immediate relief

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Charity has an important role in responding to immediate human suffering. Food distribution during disasters, donations for medical treatment and assistance to people affected by conflict can save lives.

Civil society organisations, religious institutions and philanthropic individuals often provide support where formal institutions are unable to respond quickly.

However, charity generally depends upon voluntary generosity. A person receiving charity has limited control over its availability, quantity and continuity. Therefore, charity cannot by itself guarantee dignity or social security.

Justice addresses structural deprivation

Justice asks a deeper question: why does deprivation exist?

If a child lacks education because the family is poor, providing occasional books may help temporarily. Ensuring universal access to quality education addresses the structural problem.

Similarly, distributing food to hungry workers may provide immediate relief, but employment opportunities, fair wages, social security and affordable food systems provide a more sustainable solution.

Thus, justice transforms assistance from an act of benevolence into an entitlement based on rights.

Justice and equality of opportunity

A just society seeks to ensure that circumstances of birth do not permanently determine life outcomes. Access to education, healthcare, nutrition, employment and political participation enables individuals to develop their capabilities.

Public education and healthcare are therefore not simply welfare expenditures; they are instruments of social justice.

Affirmative action and targeted welfare for historically disadvantaged groups can similarly promote substantive equality by addressing accumulated disadvantages.

The Indian context

The Indian Constitution provides a normative framework for social justice. Fundamental Rights establish equality and dignity, while Directive Principles seek to promote social and economic justice.

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Programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee framework, the Public Distribution System and social-security measures reflect the movement from charity towards institutional protection.

The objective is not merely to help citizens when they become vulnerable but to build systems that reduce vulnerability itself.

Justice and dignity

Dependence upon charity can sometimes create an unequal relationship between giver and receiver. The giver becomes a benefactor while the recipient may experience loss of autonomy or dignity.

Rights-based welfare changes this relationship. A citizen receiving healthcare or social security does not necessarily receive a favour; they exercise an entitlement established through law and public policy.

Justice therefore strengthens dignity by recognising people as rights-bearing citizens rather than passive beneficiaries.

Why charity will still remain necessary

A just society cannot eliminate the need for charity entirely. Natural disasters, sudden illnesses, refugee crises and extraordinary humanitarian emergencies may create needs that institutions cannot immediately meet.

Moreover, certain individuals may require specialised assistance because of circumstances that cannot be fully addressed through universal programmes.

Charity can therefore supplement justice, especially during emergencies. The ethical problem arises when charity becomes a substitute for justice.

From charity to social responsibility

The ideal relationship between charity and justice is complementary. Philanthropy can support innovation, disaster relief, education and social entrepreneurship. But philanthropy should not allow governments or institutions to escape their responsibility to provide basic rights.

Similarly, corporate social responsibility can complement public programmes but cannot replace responsible regulation, fair wages or environmental compliance.

Justice as prevention

The strongest argument for justice is that it prevents deprivation rather than merely responding to it. Effective labour laws can prevent

exploitation. Universal healthcare can reduce catastrophic medical expenditure. Quality education can prevent intergenerational poverty. Social security can reduce vulnerability in old age.

Justice therefore works upstream, whereas charity often works downstream.

Conclusion

Charity reflects compassion, but justice reflects institutionalised compassion through rights, equality and fair opportunities. A humane society needs both, but their roles are different. Charity should remain available wherever immediate suffering demands solidarity, while justice should progressively eliminate the structural inequalities that make large-scale dependence on charity necessary. The ultimate goal is a society where people do not have to ask for favours to live with dignity because institutions guarantee them a fair opportunity to flourish.

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