



Democracy of producers

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(Mains GS 2 & 3 : Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation & Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.)

Context:

- Every functioning system needs regular corrections, so is India's largest democracy, which is praised for conducting “free and fair elections”.
- It is high time to introspect whether we have imbibed the democratic spirit and if we exercise it without fear or favour.

Democracy is about freedom:

- Rosa Luxemburg famously opined that real freedom is the freedom to disagree. In a functional sense, democracy means discussion, debate and dissent.
- But in India public space is shrinking with only some spaces provided by political parties wherein discussions are directed and controlled.
- Structurally, democracy must mean equality; but equality is possible only in a non-hierarchical situation.

Culture of inequality:

- In India’s case, inequality is the very base of our culture, an unquestioning acceptance of a “culture of inequality.”
- Democracy is not an end in itself; it is a means to an end that should be socially defined and determined.

- For instance, development, in a democratic sense, must be inclusive, equitable and sustainable.
- People should be the primary agents in the formulation, implementation, overseeing and evaluation of programmes and projects.

Accommodative democracy:

- India has an accommodative democracy as it accommodates socio-economic inequalities, regional and sectoral imbalances etc.
- Under the democratic decentralisation, what really happened was the devolution of certain centrally determined functions, responsibilities and resources to lower tiers of administration, without changing the power structures — social, economic, political, and religious.

Power itself a problem:

- Power , whether at the national, regional, local, corporate or family level, always tends towards centralisation. In this sense, power cannot be decentralised.
- In other words, centralisation of power is not the problem and its decentralisation is not the solution.
- Power itself is the problem, as it is always used by the powerful against the powerless, by the strong against the weak, by the rich against the poor.

Instrument of oppression:

- History testifies that in a class-divided society, the state, which epitomises power, protects the rich and powerful from or against the poor and the oppressed.
- The more unequal a society, the more authoritarian the state.
- In India, because economic inequalities are egregious and increasing, the state is becoming more and more authoritarian.

The Leadership:

- In democracy, we have efficient rulers, efficient administrators, and an efficient police force.
- Democracy means efficient administration, strengthening and maintaining the status quo, and not changing the system where stability and continuity are preferred.
- Questioning inequities invites draconian laws, reminding us of the statement made in the Madras High Court by famous lawyer and human rights activist Kannabiran: “Crime is defined by law, but the criminal is determined by the state.”

Ensure real democracy:

- Real democracy is economic democracy, as Ambedkar stressed.
- A starting point is ensuring economic security to all, not through an income transfer programme (universal basic income), but through the provision of universal property rights.
- The poor should be treated not as welfare scroungers, but as consumers, active producers, and potential entrepreneurs.
- MGNREGA allocation must be utilised not for creating wage-employment but for building the asset base of the poor, developing entrepreneurship (business as well as social) among them, building idea/incubation centres and helping undertake production/ business units, individually or on a group basis.

Conclusion:

- The founder of Bangladesh's Grameen Bank Muhammad Yunus describes the poor as "natural entrepreneurs".
- Thus start treating the underclass not just as wage workers/passive recipients of welfare benefits, but as potential producers to build a democracy of "freely associated producers."