1. What are the key traits of a socially empowered community? Illustrate.

Approach:

Question is straight forward in its approach students are expected to write about the traits of socially empowered communities in India also it is important to mention examples aas well.

Introduction:

Social Empowerment means all the sections of society in India, have equal control over their lives, are able to take important decisions in their lives, and have equal opportunities. Without empowering all sections of society equally, a nation can never have a good growth trajectory. It is understood as the process of developing a sense of autonomy and self-confidence, and acting individually and collectively to change social relationships and the institutions and discourses that exclude poor people and keep them in poverty.

Body:

Perceptions of being empowered vary across time, culture, and domains of a person's life-
- A low-caste person feels empowered when he/she is given a fair hearing in a public meeting, which is comprised of men and women from the different social and economic group.
- A woman from a conservative household feels empowered if she's allowed to go out alone without being escorted by a male from her house.
- A transgender feels empowered when she's given employment.

The need for Social Empowerment-
- Social empowerment leads one to take the right job and hence reduce the incidence of unemployment and under-employment.
- Social empowerment leads to a decrease in social violence engineered against the deprived section of the society. If one is empowered socially, they know the rights they enjoy and the duties they serve.
- Social empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption as people tend to understand the exploitive class and restrain from giving any bribe which ultimately reduces corruption.
- Social empowerment is one approach to reduce poverty. When people are empowered, they tend to use the knowledge in the right direction and somehow reduce their poverty which is so important for national growth also.
- The main advantage of empowerment is that their will be an overall and inclusive development of the society. The money that people earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also helps develop the society.

Traits of socially empowered communities in India-

- Communities like Jains, Parsis, Baniyas fair better in social indicators like health, education, nutrition, social status etc compared to other religious communities like muslims and socially disadvantaged groups like Dalits.
- They also have better economic opportunities and standard of living compared to other communities in India.
- These communities have high nutrition levels compared to other religious communities in India.
- Social empowerment has led to increased political opportunities as well Parsi community has been one of the most politically conscious community which has made them aware of their rights and duties towards the state.
- Political decisions like 73rd and 74th amendments has led to political empowerment of people at village and ward level this directly empowered people socially as well many of the women have taken part in the grassroot democratic process and thus have become the agents of change themselves.
- Reservation has become an important tool in the hands of government to allow marginalised sections like SCs,STs,women etc to take part in the governance system and allow equal opportunities for all sections of the society.
- Other important traits of empowered communities are tolerance, Fraternity, brotherhood, sense of justice, incorruptible attitude and proper work ethic which make them to excel in all walks of life.

Conclusion:

Social empowerment is necessary to fulfil the constitutional obligations like providing equal opportunities for all the sections of the society in India and for that Education is one such powerful tool to break all odds faced by socially vulnerable people, and it is the best available tool to empower them. Needed measures must be taken to eliminate discrimination based on any factor, through the universalization of education. It is important to include sex education, a secular curriculum, and the art of intolerance through schools and university syllabus which not only bring awareness but also help to mobilize a large section of people to voice for the vulnerable section of the society to provide livelihood opportunities for those people identified as vulnerable. Because the present society demands people to be economically empowered to be socially empowered.

2. Do you think communalism feeds on India's highly polarised electoral politics? Critically comment.

Approach

The candidate needs to comment on the aspect of communalism feeding on India's highly polarised electoral politics and also giving counter arguments to it with proper substantiation.

Introduction

Communalism, in a broad sense means a strong attachment to one's own community. In popular discourse in India, it is understood as unhealthy attachment to one's own religion. It has permeated into the electoral politics in India to a great extent in recent times.

Body

- India is pigeonholed by more ethnic and religious groups as compared to other countries of the world. Religion has great influence on political pattern in Indian society. Politicians use religion as their loopholes.
- In India, Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism are major religions practised by the people. Numerically, the Hindus have the majority. This initiates contestations that have often resulted in communal uprisings.
- Religion in Indian politics can be linked to the country since pre-independence periods. It is supposed that the British, who ruled India for more than 100 years around the 19th century, pitched one community against the other to decline the freedom struggle.
- Post-independence, the nation saw partition in the initial period, which led to widespread communal riots across the borders. Partition also left a permanent imprint on the national conscience and has been exploited by political parties till date.
- The period till 1980's also saw multiple incidences of communalism, which were exploited by political parties. The Bangladeshi refugee's influx also led to growing polarisation in north east as well as eastern India, where a humanitarian tragedy was converted into a pitched religious issue.
- It is evident from the above examples that communalism developed in society due to multitude of factors and has its effect on electoral politics but this situation changed in 1980's.
- Shah Bano case and the subsequent events led to charges of minority appeasement, which transformed into full-fledged assertion of majority communalism which revived the dormant Ram Mandir Movement.
- Here, electoral politics started the initiation of communalising tendencies in society instead of the earlier phenomenon. The Babri Masjid demolition not only encouraged communal violence in several parts of the country, in which

many people died, but also separated people along religious lines. Consequently, the BJP emerged as a major party.

But at the same time, it is important to note that polarised electoral politics has multiple other factors, some of which are –

- Caste politics in the last three decades have been marked by the desire for power on the caste-lines rather than a substantial agenda for social reform of the downtrodden.
- Criminalisation of Politics: It refers to a situation in which the anti-social elements enter the electoral process by contesting elections, getting elected to the legislature, and consequently occupying public offices.

Further, Communalism is also prevalent due to many other factors, some of which are –

- Economic Causes – Uneven development, class divisions, poverty and unemployment aggravates insecurity in the common men which make them vulnerable to political manipulation.
- Administrative Failure – A weak law and order is one of the causes of communal violence.
- Psychological Factors – The lack of inter-personal trust and mutual understanding between two communities often result in perception of threat, harassment, etc.
- Role of Media – It is often accused of sensationalism and disseminates rumours as "news" which sometimes resulted into further tension and riots between two rival religious groups.
- Social media has also emerged as a powerful medium to spread messages relating to communal tension or riot in any part of the country.

Way Forward –

- Establishment of Peace committees that mediate in times of volatile situations.
- Regulation of Media, especially social media so that rumours and fake news are not spread.
- Check on Communal Agenda and politicization by way of strict implementation of law like on speeches during electioneering.

Conclusion

It can be evaluated that in the Indian culture, religion has significant role. Therefore, Gandhiji's preaching of brotherhood among the different religious groups needs to revived and secular traditions, rooted in our cultural ethos must be propagated where separation of religion from politics needs to be emphasised and implemented across the length and breadth of the country.

3. Do you think lack of development creates the breeding ground for regionalism? Substantiate.

Approach

Candidates are expected to write about regionalism and then substantiate how lack of development creates regionalism.

Introduction

The roots of regional consciousness in India can be found in the colonial policies. Differential attitudes and treatment by the British towards princely states and those of the presidencies developed regionalist tendencies among them. British exploitative economic policies and later successive governments completely neglected some regions, giving way to economic disparities and regional imbalances.

Body

Regionalism:
- Regionalism is the expression of a common sense of identity and purpose by people within a specific geographical region, united by its unique language, culture, language, etc.
- Regionalism has been interpreted as extreme loyalty or love to a particular region which may undermine the interest of the nation or the state of which the region is a part. There is always a natural tenancy towards the primacy of regionalistic over nationalistic.

Lack of development led to regionalism:
- In the present times, uneven developments in different parts of the country can be construed as the prime reason for regionalism and separatism.
- There are certain regions in the country where industries and factories have been concentrated, educational and health facilities are sufficiently provided, communication net work has been developed, rapid agricultural development has been made possible.
- But there are also certain areas where the worth of independence is yet to be realized in terms of socio-economic development.
- Of course, the British administration may be held responsible for causing such wide regional variations due to their suitability for the purpose of administration, trade and commerce.
- It should be noted that roots of disparity in two regions was in colonial rule. Andhra was under direct rule of crown while Telangana was ruled by Nizam of Hyderabad, who was not so efficient ruler. So over time Andhra got more developed in comparison to Telangana.
- But in the post-Independence era, efforts should have been made for regional balance in matters of industrial, agricultural and above all, economic development. This disparity has caused the feeling of relative deprivation among the inhabitants of economically neglected regions. It has manifested

itself in the demand for separate states such as Bodoland or Jharkhand land, Uttarakhand, etc.

- This is source of tension and gives birth to sub-regional movements for separate states. Jarkhand, Chattisgarh, Uttrakhand and recently Telangana are result of these failure only. Many such demands are in pipeline such as- Vidarbha, Saurashtra, Darjeeling and Bodoland, etc. These failures also weakens the confidence of private players and do not attract investors in the states.
- One of the basic reason Assam agitations is because of the expansion of education, particularly higher education, but not industrialization and other job creating institutions is increasing the army of educated youths in the backward regions. The Bodo agitation is led by the Assam Bodo Students Union which is demanding a separate state and has resorted to wide scale violence and series of crippling bandhs to pursue their demand.
- The existence of relative deprivation is one of the most important aspects in constructing the argument for regionalism. For example, Gorkha Nationalist Liberation Forum (GNLF) started its movement in the Darjeeling. In the view of GNLF, Darjeeling was the most underdeveloped region in comparison to the southern part of West Bengal.
- These frustrated young men are allured by the movements of regionalism against the inflow of people from other countries and states. On the other hand these unemployed youths are also attracted by the caste, communal and other sectional agitations fighting for the protection of rights on sectarian lines.

Wayforward:
- Formation of the NITI Aayog has been a positive step to enhance co-operative federalism by fostering the involvement of the State Governments of India in the economic policy-making process using a bottom-up approach.
- Schemes like "Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat" have been launched by the GOI to celebrate unity in diversity culture of the nation and to strengthen sentiment for National Unity between the citizens of states, is a welcomed step.
- Introducing a system of national education through NEP that would help people to overcome regional feelings and develop an attachment towards the nation can act as a long-term solution to the problem of sub-nationalism.

Conclusion

The need of the hour is to develop each region of India, through devolution of power to local governments and empowering people for their participation in decision-making. The governments need to find out the alternative source of employment for local people, use of technology in governance, planning and for agriculture development for Faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth.

4. What are the recent debates surrounding the concept and practice of secularism in India? What are your views on the same?

Approach- Candidate is expected to define Indian secularism and give a brief evolution while citing judgements of S.C. Underlining recent debates on secularism answer can be concluded by commenting on future of secularism in India.

Introduction

The concept of secularism is multifaceted as well as flexible. The classical "Western" theories have emphasized on the "Wall of Separation" model of secularism. This model was best summarized by Donald Eugene Smith as encompassing three relationships between the individual and religion (freedom of religion), the state and the individual (citizenship) and the state and religion (separation of church and state).

Body

Indian secularism
- Indian Constitution guarantees to its citizens six fundamental rights, one of which is the right to freedom of religion. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution gives each citizen:
    1. Freedom of Conscience
    2. Right to Profess any religion
    3. Right to Practice any religion
    4. Right to Propagate any religion
- Article 25 covers not only religious beliefs (doctrines) but also religious practices (rituals). Moreover, these rights are available to all persons—citizens as well as non-citizens. However, there are reasonable restrictions on the fundamental rights of the citizens and central government/state government, in time of need, can interfere with the religious affairs of the citizens.
- There has been question mark on the status of India as a secular state. D.E. Smith held that India has a few features of secular state and not all. He held that there are three features of secular state
    1. Freedom of religion
    2. Universal citizenship and right to equality
    3. Separation between religion and state.
- In Indian context third feature is missing. So India is a secular state only in partial sense. In Indian context minorities are natural custodians of secular state, hence nature of indian state as secular state will depend in large extent on minorities. If they're organised and conscious about their rights, India will remain secular.
- But Indian secularism with western lens is unjustified as every country has its unique model. Indian secularism emerged as a response to muslim league's

demand for separate state for muslims in the subcontinent. From this lens we can outline some of the prominent features of secularism

1. State is not identified with any particular religion, but it not averts to use of religion.
2. No strict boundary rather porous boundary.
3. No active hostility towards religion, nor indifference
4. Different religions are in the foundation of state
5. There is no overarching idea.
6. Politically negotiated model.

- In S. R. Bommai case, Supreme court held that India has both positive and negative secularism. Positive secularism means state shall regulate religion by law and negative secularism means state will not patronise any religion.
- S.C. also highlighted that religious tolerance and the idea of fraternity is the basic feature of Indian secularism.

Threats to Indian secularism
- Misusing for Electoral benefits: Opportunistic distance (engagement or disengagement), mainly opportunistic alliance with religious communities, particularly for the sake of immediate electoral benefit
- Neglecting the Core Idea of Indian Secularism: Political parties have bizarrely interpreted 'respect' to mean cutting deals with aggressive or orthodox sections of religious groups at times igniting communal violence.
- Victimization of Communities: Principled intervention by State in one religion is viewed as discriminatory treatment by fringe sections of society leading to Politicisation of Secularism
- Politicisation of any one religious group leads to the competitive politicisation of other groups, thereby resulting in inter-religious conflict.
- Requires Continuous Civic Participation: India's constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone but requires collective commitment from an impartial judiciary, a scrupulous media, civil society activists, and an alert citizenry.

Way ahead
- In Sabrimala case verdict S.C. gave decision in favour of women entering temple, but this has triggered larger issue of what exactly is principled distance means in context of Indian secularism.
- Views of justice Indu Malhotra and constitution of larger bench to decide on the same is indicative of new emerging debate in India on secularism.

Conclusion

Indian secularism is not an end in itself but a means to address religious plurality and sought to achieve peaceful coexistence of different religions. There is need to shift focus from a politically-led Secularism project to a socially-driven movement for justice.

5. What factors can be attributed for the failure in containing the spread of COVID-19? What measures would you suggest to curb the surge?

Approach

Mention the factors attributed for the failure in containing the spread of COVID-19. Also mention measures to curb the surge.

Introduction

Amid the COVID-19, the system that has been developed to provide a global response to epidemics and pandemics failed miserably. Covid-19 spread all over the world, shutting down entire countries. Governments, and even subnational governments competed fiercely for scarce medical stocks and critical supply chains disrupted due to governmental export restrictions.

Body

Factors attributing for the failure in containing the spread of COVID-19

- The WHO was simply not fit for this purpose. This stems from its subservience to major funding states, which dates back to the 1970s.
- Today, the WHO's total annual budget is around $5.6 billion. By comparison, the Australian federal health budget for 2019–20 was $120 billion, and even bigger if the states' budget is included.
- Unsurprisingly, this has had the effect of limiting the WHO's capacity, as well as making it highly responsive to its main funding states, thus jeopardizing its independence.
- A second important aspect of global health governance pre-Covid-19 was its operation through domestic state institutions. The underlying assumption was that infectious diseases are likely to emerge in developing countries, due to their poor sanitation and governance capacities, then spread to other parts of the world. Although very limited financial support was available to help developing countries build up their domestic health systems, they were subjected to ongoing surveillance by the WHO and developed countries.
- When disease outbreaks occurred, developed countries provided funding and intervened temporarily to address the immediate problem. This funding would eventually dry out as the outbreak was deemed to have been brought under control. Other than such intermittent interventions, which did little to build up primary health capacity in their recipient states, countries were largely supposed to use their own resources towards pandemic preparedness. Thus, very limited collective capacities had emerged, even within the European Union.
- These factors combined to create a spectacular global health governance failure after the emergence of Covid-19.

Measures to curb the surge

- Broad lockdown is the simplest, most blunt tool to break the chain of transmission, which reduces the probability of people getting infected and lightens the load on the health care system.
- Mask mandates is another measure to curb the surge of the COVID virus.
- We should certainly shut down restaurants and bars first before anything else. Also curfews and limiting the gathering will keep a check on the surge too.

Conclusion

While these measures work short term, if they aren't implemented for a long enough time to truly decrease transmission, once they are relaxed there will be a rebound of cases. With the virus spreading at record speed, it's still far from clear that even data-driven, tailored approaches will work, given the enormous reach of the virus and the coming holiday travel season. Ultimately it's like there's a fire raging, but you're only able to douse the spot fires and wait for help.