

"Democracy and illiteracy do not move together"

Outline:

① Introduction:

Thesis statement: While democracy is sustained through constitutional and bureaucratic means, it requires an auxiliary socio-cultural climate to flourish.

② Understanding the key terms involved:

Democracy ; illiteracy.

③ How democracy is compromised without a literate pool? Apocalyptic manifestations:

① lack of awareness results in voter manipulation.

• Free and Fair Network Report 2013.

② No accountability of rulers.

• Punjab RTI Commission Report 2020.

③ Reluctance of illiterate people to exercise their democratic rights

• lower voter turnout in less literate districts PBS Report 2018.

④ illiteracy as a major cause of crime and ultimately a weak rule of law.

(E) low female literacy rate results in half of electorate being held back.

- case study of Bihar, India.

(F) Democratic participation as a luxury for illiterate poor people overshadowed by daily survival.

- Yellow Vest protests in France.

(G) Illiteracy as a primary cause for intolerance and anti-pluralism undermining core democratic values.

- case study of Afghanistan.

(H) Censored and ideologically-biased curriculum obstructs critical thinking and discourages meaningful political participation.

(I) Digital illiteracy makes people prone to propaganda and misinformation.

- Post Pahalagam attack misinformation in India.

(J) Policy making become elite centric and disconnected from grass roots.

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(4) Addressing illiteracy for democratic consolidation - A way forward:

(A) Integrating civic and democratic awareness in early education to develop politically conscious citizens.

- Post Arab spring Tunisia.

(B) Targeted schemes to ^{improve} promote female literacy rate.

- case study: Zehar-e-Taleem initiative Punjab, Pakistan.

(C) Introduce skill development programs with economic incentives

- village education programs, Indonesia's.

(D) Civic awareness campaigns for people in remote areas.

- Imams in Morocco.

(E) Reform national curriculum to promote critical thinking, political neutrality, and digital literacy.

(5) Conclusion:

“A nation that is ignorant and free... never was and never will be.”

Thomas Jefferson, former American President, emphasized on the importance of education. He implied that when a nation is ignorant or illiterate, it can never achieve freedom. While democracy is sustained through constitutional and bureaucratic means, it needs an auxiliary socio-cultural climate to flourish. That climate would only be guaranteed when literacy prevails in a society. Democracy is compromised without a literate population. Voters are easily manipulated when they are unaware of the ongoing political affairs. Rulers go unaccounted and unchecked for their actions. Illiterate people are reluctant to exercise their due rights and do not demand for them either. Moreover, crime thrives in an illiterate society and ultimately, the rule of law, a basic component of democracy, is compromised. In an already

illiterate society, women's literacy rate remains exponentially lower than that of males. This results in half of electorate ~~not~~ being held back. Furthermore, illiteracy is a primary cause of poverty.

Poor people, overshadowed by daily survival, ^{remain} are reluctant to participate in the democracy. Illiteracy undoubtedly hinders smooth democratic process. However, steps could be taken to curb this problem.

Before delving into problems caused by illiteracy and to the democracy, it is pertinent to understand these terms. Democracy is a system of government where power is vested in the people either directly, or indirectly through elected representatives.

Its key features include accountability, free and fair elections, protection of individual rights, and the rule of law.

Separately, illiteracy is the inability of an individual to read, write, and having no civic education. Number of educated people in a certain area is

(6)

defined as literacy rate of that particular area or city.

The first and foremost problem caused by illiteracy is that voters become easily manipulated by those contesting the elections. In a democracy, people choose their representatives. Since the democracy is by the people, it is expected of them to choose their respective representatives wisely. Due to illiteracy, they are unable to perform that duty in a democratic country and get manipulated by fake promises of the politicians. In a remote area of rural Sindh in Pakistan, at the time of election, when an assistant presiding officer asked people why they were all voting for the same party that has deprived their village of basic facilities, their simple answer was that the founding father of that party gave many sacrifices. This event clearly illustrates how easily ~~are~~ illiterate people get manipulated.

Second, ill-actions and corruption of rulers go unaccounted

and unchecked in a country where its people are illiterate. They can not read newspapers, understand legal processes, and hidden agendas. This makes them unable to even detect what is going on or whether their sorry state is due to the corruption or not. Moreover, when the corruption scandal of a politician is actually exposed, he easily makes them forget by means of a mere emotional speech. As per Punjab Right to Information Commission Report 2020, there were very small number of applications submitted. This clearly shows the people's unawareness and inability to hold the corrupt politician accountable.

Third, illiterate people are reluctant to exercise their due democratic rights. The main and primary cause for that problem is that they are unaware of their due rights, let alone fight to have them. They are unaware of the power their votes hold. In a democracy, vote is a sole powerful tool that people

can use to have their all democratic rights being guaranteed. As per Pakistan Bureau of statistics 2017, voter turnout was lower in districts with lower literacy rates. Therefore, illiteracy holds people back from exercising their due democratic rights.

Moreover, illiteracy is a major cause of crime in a society. ~~that~~ ^{crime} leads to weakened rule of law, which is an important characteristic of democracy. Rule of law guarantees ~~that~~ a smooth and unhindered democratic process. Furthermore, illiteracy breeds ignorance in individuals which ultimately becomes reason for their deviant behaviour. In Norway, literacy focused rehabilitation programs for criminals resulted in lower recidivism. Hence, literacy is essential to maintain the rule of law.

To add on, in ^a society where illiteracy ^{already} prevails, female literacy rate is even lower than that of males.

which results in half of the electorate being held back.

Inclusivity, an essential and most important component of democracy is compromised because of women being unable to participate. Male dominated society driven by illiteracy is the major cause of marginalization of women in getting education. This marginalization ultimately becomes the primary cause of democratic backsliding. In 2011, female literacy rate of Bihar in India stood at 51 percent resulting in lowest female voter turnout. Therefore, lower female literacy rate undermines the democracy.

Similarly, poverty is a by-product of illiteracy. Poor people's participation in the democratic process is a luxury because of their already problematic life overshadowed by their daily survival. Marginalized and poor people, already ignored by the state and its inability to secure their trust, avoid democratic participation at the expense of their daily survival. This

results in the democratic back-sliding of a state. For example, Yellow Vests protests in France were driven by the state's inability to reduce taxes on poor class.

Ultimately, these protests manifested direct democracy instead of going through proper democratic institutions. Therefore, poverty as a result of illiteracy, affects smooth democratic process.

Furthermore, intolerance and anti-pluralism are deeply rooted in illiteracy. Intolerance undermines the true essence of democracy ~~because~~. In a democratic state democracy is not limited to only one ethnic, religious, cultural, or political group. When these groups do not tolerate each other anti-pluralism is borne and ultimately give rise to populist slogans and movements. For instance, in Afghanistan, from ethnic Hazaras to dissent religious voices, everyone is deprived of their basic rights. Resultantly, democracy is nowhere to be seen in Afghanistan and Authoritarian rule is prevailing.

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From the above facts it is evident that illiteracy undermines core democratic norms.

Additionally, meaningful political participation is discouraged and critical thinking is compromised when curriculum is biased and censored. The beauty of democracy is that people are provided with number of candidates to choose as their representative. This process is done by people on the basis of their conscience and political awareness. When their ability to elect is compromised using a curriculum that censors historical events and praises only a certain leader in the beginning of their education, democracy takes a backseat. For example, children are taught to respect their supreme leader and are told about the bravery of Kim Jong Un. This clearly illustrates how curriculum that is biased affects democracy.

Moreover, in the changing global dynamics, new tools of spreading propaganda and misinformation are being used. Illiterate people, unequipped with knowledge,

analytical understanding, are prone to misinformation and propaganda. Authoritarian leaders and populist regimes use these tools to counter dissent and promote their good will among the people. Amongst these tools, social and electronic media are on the top. For example, Victor Orsborn of Argentina used electronic media for his election campaign and came back to power. If people were literate enough to understand the propaganda, the demagogue would have been lost. Hence, digital illiteracy makes people ~~prone~~ ^{susceptible} to propaganda and misinformation.

Furthermore - in a country where illiteracy prevails, policy making is often centered around the elite and common men are neglected. Unaware of their due rights, illiterate people present little or no demands for necessary reforms that are much needed for their betterment. Moreover, the ignorance of people allow the elite to do such lawmaking which provides them with necessary means to remain in power. Toaqir Hussain,

in his article that is "of the elite - for the elite, by the elite" describes how elites make policies that favour them and ignore the needs of the masses. This clearly shows how illiterate masses are disenfranchised in policy making.

Although illiteracy hinders ^{number of} a smooth democratic process, ^{steps} and measures could be taken to alleviate this problem down to sustainable levels.

First, the integration of civic and democratic awareness in the children's early education will prove instrumental in providing a nation with future generation of politically conscious citizens. From ancient times to modern ones, democracy got incorporated in the nations gradually. Same goes for the children of the nation. Parents should inculcate civic values in the children's subconscious mind. After that, schools have the responsibility to teach them about democratic norms. Tunisia, in its post Arab spring era, formally

included democratic education to promote democracy. Similar steps should be taken by countries with rising illiteracy to achieve democracy.

Second, targeted schemes should be introduced to improve female literacy rate. These schemes include awareness drives and scholarships. Separate educational institutions for girls only will also prove instrumental in areas where cultural and social barriers for girls' education exist. Further, these targeted schemes empower the women of a society to actively participate in democratic events.

In Punjab, Pakistan province of Pakistan, a special initiative to improve girls' education named 'Zewar-e-Taleem' initiative was introduced. Such programs should be introduced in illiterate countries to empower half of its population and ultimately improve their democratic situation.

Third, skill development programs should be introduced along with economic incentives.

These programs should specially target the poor people, people that are unable to afford education. Incentives will attract these people to join such programs. Moreover, education, along with economic independence will ~~empower~~ enable the people to understand their rights in a democracy and participate in it without constraints respectively. Indonesia introduced "village education programs" to do just the job. Therefore, skill development programs will enable a country to thrive democratically.

Additionally, civic awareness campaigns for people residing in remote areas will also help a country to curb the democratic illiteracy. People, although equipped with necessary economic means, also lack democratic understanding due to various social, cultural, or religious norms. Moreover, these awareness programs must be delicate in nature keeping in view what people hold sacred. For example, holding cultural events that

promote democratic values for culturally inclined people. In Morocco, Imams of mosques were assigned and trained to educate the people about democracy in sermons. Similar actions should be taken by every country with worsened democratic situation.

lastly, national curriculums should be reformed to promote critical thinking, political neutrality, and digital literacy. This step will eliminate obstruction to critical thinking by removing biased content and adding overall historical context. Further, education is a key prerequisite to participate in democracy and a nationally uniform curriculum will promote mutual tolerance and forbearance among the diverse class of students. Coupled with digital content, the curriculum will become ideal in incorporating ideal values in the youth. Keeping in view the diverse demography, of Pakistan introduced a 'single National Curriculum'. Hence, an inclusive, unbiased, and digital curriculum will equip

the students with necessary knowledge and understanding to actively participate in democracy.

To sum up, democracy needs an additional yet necessary socio-cultural climate to thrive along with constitutional and bureaucratic means. In an illiterate society, female literacy is ultimately compromised. Resultantly, half of the population is deprived of democratic meaningful democratic participation. Participation in democracy is also a luxury for illiterate poor people. Moreover, illiteracy is primary cause of intolerance and anti-pluralism in people. Curriculum that is ideologically biased and censored disarm the students off critical thinking. Furthermore, digital illiteracy makes people prone to propaganda and misinformation. Policy making become elite centric when people are illiterate. In a true democracy, every citizen is expected to make informed decisions, yet illiteracy undermines that very foundation. Illiteracy could be curbed through

(18)

deliberate reforms, widespread education, and social awareness.

A literate citizen is an empowered voter. An empowered voter is the guardian of the democracy. The path toward democracy begins in the classroom.