

Chapter - 18 The Argumentative Indian

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Question 1.

Sen quotes Eliot's lines: 'Not fare well/But fare forward voyagers'. Distinguish between 'faring forward' (Krishna's position in the Gita) and 'faring well' (the position that Sen advocates).

Answer:

Krishna advocated that one shouldn't care about the consequences when carrying out one's duty, as long as the cause is just. This is in contrast to what Sen suggests. Sen advocates 'faring well' and questions the idea of not caring for consequences of what we consider, to be our duty. He also says that in the present world of terrorism, wars, and violence, Arjuna's line of questioning should also be considered along with Krishna's teachings.

Question 2.

Sen draws a parallel between the moral dilemma in the Krishna-Arjuna dialogue and J. R. Oppenheimer's response to the nuclear explosion in 1945. What is the basis for this?

Answer:

J.R Oppenheimer was the Physicist who leads the American team that created the nuclear weapon, who even quoted Krishna's words and later reflected upon his own actions. Although Oppenheimer might have his own justification for his creation (he was doing his duty for a cause he thought was just), the consequences of it cannot be ignored. In fact, Arjuna's concerns hold true to Oppenheimer's situation. This is the parallel that Sen draws between the moral dilemmas of the two situations.

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Question 1.

Maitreyi's remark— 'what should I do with that by which I do not become immortal'—is a rhetorical question cited to illustrate both the nature of the human predicament and the limitations of the material world. What is the connection that Sen draws between this and his concept of economic development?

Answer:

Sen uses the remark made by Maitreyi to bring out a certain similarity in his analysis of economic development. The limitations of the material world are compared to wealth and our ability to live. Sen basis his opinion on the remark, where he says that true development cannot be measured simply by the growth of GDP and GNP.

Question 2.

It is important to see that the Indian argumentative tradition has frequently crossed the barriers of gender, caste, class, and community. List the examples cited by Sen to highlight this.

Answer:

Sen points out that some of the important positions in the Indian politics were led by women, such as Sarojini Naidu, Nellie Sengupta, etc. He also states that women have raised some important questions, even at earlier times, as early as the Upanishads that were composed in 8th century BCE, such as the women Scholar, Gargi and Yajnavalkya's wife, Maitreyi. The barriers of caste and religion have also been crossed several times. For instance, when the Brahman domination was questioned by other castes and when Buddhism and Jainism evolved as rebellious religious movements. The medieval age also saw the poets, both Hindus, and Muslims rejecting the social barriers.

Understanding The Text

Question 1.

What is a Sen's interpretation of the positions taken by Krishna and Arjuna in the debate between them?

Answer:

Note Sen's comment: 'Arjuna's contrary arguments are not really vanquished... There remains a powerful case for 'faring well' and not just 'faring forward'.

Sen feels that Arjuna's position of 'faring well' should not completely be overlooked, irrespective of the message that Bhagavad Gita conveys. He feels that Krishna's position of 'faring forward' irrespective of the consequences cannot be justified in the contemporary world of wars and violence. He also supports this argument by stating J.R. Oppenheimer (the physicist who led the American team that developed the nuclear weapon) as an example.

Question 2.

What are the three major issues Sen discusses here in relation to India's dialogic tradition?

Answer:

Sen mainly talks about the issues of gender, caste, and voice and breaking these barriers in light of the argumentative tradition in India. He also states that these barriers have been broken on numerous occasions, even at times as early as 8th century BCE.

Question 3.

Sen has sought here to dispel some misconceptions about democracy in India. What are these misconceptions?

Answer:

Two main misconceptions about democracy in India which Sen has sought to dispel are 1) the assumption that India was gifted the practice of democracy by the western world and it simply adopted democracy after its independence 2) that India, due to its history, is particularly suited for democracy.

Question 4.

How, according to Sen, has the tradition of public discussion and interactive reasoning helped the success of democracy in India?

Answer:

Sen believed that public discussion and interactive reasoning helped in shaping the social world and culture in India. According to him, the argumentative tradition deeply influenced the Indian politics and helped to make heterodoxy the natural state of affairs in India. He also states that persistent arguments are an important part of the public life in India.

Talking About The Text

Question 1.

Does Amartya Sen see argumentation as a positive or a negative value?

Answer:

Sen sees argumentation as a positive value. He believes that the argumentative tradition greatly shapes our social world and culture. According to Sen, it became an important part of our public life and has also deeply influenced the Indian politics. He even argues that argumentation was a major contribution to the development of democracy in India.

Question 2.

How is the message of the Gita generally understood and portrayed? What change in interpretation does Sen suggest?

Answer:

The Gita is usually understood as a one-sided wisdom given by Krishna. However, Sen argues that Arjuna's consequential analysis should also be considered in light of the contemporary world. He suggests that the interpretation of the Gita requires supplementation by the broader argumentative wisdom of the Mahabharata.

Appreciation

Question 1.

This essay is an example of argumentative writing. Supporting statements with evidence is a feature of this kind of writing.

For each of the statements given below state the supportive evidence provided in the essay:

(i) Prolivity is not alien to India –

(ii) The arguments are also, often enough, substantive –

(iii) This admiration for the Gita, and Krishna's arguments, in particular has been a lasting phenomenon in parts of European culture –

(iv) There remains a powerful case for 'faring well', and not just 'forward' –

Answer:

(i) "Krishna Menon's record of the longest speech ever delivered at the United Nations (nine hours non-stop)"

(ii) "the famous *Bhagavad Gita*, which is one small section of the *Mahabharata*, presents a tussle between two contrary moral positions.

(iii) Krishna's emphasis on doing one's duty, on one side, and Arjuna's focus on avoiding bad consequences on the other."

(iv) "Krishna's moral position has also been eloquently endorsed by many philosophical and literary commentators across the world, such as Christopher Isherwood and T. S. Eliot. Isherwood, in fact, translated the *Bhagavad Gita* into English."

Task

Question 1.

Examine the noun phrases in these sentences from the text

- The second woman head of the Indian National Congress, Nellie Sengupta, was elected in 1933.
- This concerns the relation—and the distance—between income and achievement.
- This may be particularly significant in understanding the class basis of the rapid spread of Buddhism, in particular, in India.

Answer:

- Here, “the second woman head” is the main noun, where as “the Indian National Congress” further specifies it and additional details such as the name and the year complete the phrase
- Here, “income and achievement” is the main noun which is preceded by a relative clause
- Here, “Buddhism” is the main noun preceded by an explanatory clause.