



Mains Practice Question

Q. The citizens' right to protest is a pillar of Indian democracy. However, protests and demonstrations often become a law and order problem and a challenge to internal security. Why is it so? Discuss (250 Words)

09 Mar, 2022 GS Paper 3 Internal Security

Approach

- Briefly highlight the issue of violence during civic protests.
- Enumerate the factors responsible for protests taking undemocratic turns.
- Suggest measures to avoid this in future.

Introduction

Demonstrations and protests are a healthy feature of democracy, which allows citizens and civil society members to voice their reservations and discontent against government policies. Unfortunately, many social-political mobilizations end up in violence, riot and arson- resulting in the destruction of public property and loss of human lives. Such instances become a severe law and order problem having implications on the internal security of our nation.

Body

A number of factors are responsible for democratic protests taking undemocratic or anarchical turns

- **Internet and Social Media:** These have led to the proliferation of sources for information and deepened accessibility. However, these platforms have also become a carrier of misinformation, fake news and malicious content deliberately propagated to create a fear psychosis. Online posts and contents can lead to large scale communal or ethnic mobilizations. For example, 2020 Delhi riots and Bengaluru violence due to a communal post on Facebook.
- **Presence of radical ideologies:** India continues to battle with extremist ideas like Naxalism, Terrorism and ideology based secessionist movements. These radical ideologies often try to exploit and hijack civic protests to create social rifts, as mass support to these ideas is virtually absent. One of the prominent examples of this could be the civic protests in Kashmir which are exploited by insurgents and terrorists.
- **Policing technique and training of the forces:** Article 246 of the Constitution places 'public order' and 'police' under the jurisdiction of the state. The police forces due to poor training in managing large scale protests are found lacking on the ground. At instances, they have either used disproportionate force or have not intervened at all due administrative failure-this was glaringly highlighted in the Prakash Singh Committee report on Haryana agitations in 2016.
- **Role of Media:** The independence of media has become a serious issue in our country. Allegedly many media houses are ideologically aligned and their reporting is based on convenience, not on journalistic standards. Even the Supreme Court has expressed concerns over media trials and prevalent practices. The crisis in digital media has generated a space for rumours and false assumptions, which worsens the law and order situation during protests and political movements, as people fail to gauge real picture of the issue and are driven by emotions.

Way Forward

- The internal security of our nation rests on various social, political, administrative and technological pillars.
- India has a history of peaceful civic protests which did not yield to violence as they were based on the realization of democratic ideals both by the protestors as well as the government agencies. For example, India against corruption movement.
- In order to avoid violence, there is a need to curb fake news and train personnel to respond to varied situations in an effective manner. The Delhi Police's handling of the tractor rally with restraint despite provocation by the mob could be an inspiration for police forces across India.

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