



Mains Practice Question

Q. What are the ethical obligations of a welfare state toward its citizens? Analyze with reference to India's constitutional philosophy and social justice policies. **(150 words)**

13 Feb, 2025 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce the answer by defining the Welfare State
- Delve into the Ethical Obligations of a Welfare State
- Highlight the Challenges in Fulfilling Ethical Obligations
- Conclude with a relevant quote.

Introduction

A welfare state is founded on the principle of **social justice, ensuring the well-being of all citizens**, especially the marginalized.

- Ethical governance in a welfare state requires policies that promote **equity, inclusivity, and dignity**, aligning with moral responsibilities like **fair distribution of resources, protection of fundamental rights, and empowerment of disadvantaged sections**.

Body

Ethical Obligations of a Welfare State:

- **Protection of Fundamental Rights and Human Dignity**
 - A welfare state must guarantee **basic freedoms, equality, and dignity** for all citizens.
 - **India's Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 14-18:** Right to Equality ensures non-discrimination.
 - **Article 21: Right to Life and Personal Liberty** (expanded to include Right to Privacy, Environmental Protection, etc.).
 - **Example:** Supreme Court rulings like **K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (Right to Privacy, 2017)** reinforces **ethical commitments to personal dignity**.
- **Ensuring Social and Economic Justice:**
 - A welfare state must correct historical injustices and bridge socio-economic inequalities.
 - **Rawls' theory** supports affirmative action for marginalized communities.
 - **India's Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Preamble:** Ensures **Justice—Social, Economic, and Political**.
 - **DPSPs (Directive Principles of State Policy):** Guide the state in securing welfare through policies (Articles **38, 39, 41, 43, 46**).
 - **Example:**
 - **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** promotes economic justice through guaranteed employment.
- **Equitable Distribution of Resources:**

- Ethical governance **requires redistribution of wealth and opportunities** to uplift the weaker sections of society.
- **India's Constitutional Basis: Article 39(b):** Ensures that "**ownership and control of material resources are distributed to serve the common good.**"
- **Example: Land reforms, PM Kisan Samman Nidhi, PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana and subsidies for essential commodities.**
- **Empowerment of Marginalized Sections:**
 - A **just welfare state** takes affirmative action to uplift disadvantaged groups, ensuring equal participation in national progress.
 - **India's Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 15(4) & 16(4):** Affirmative action for SCs, STs, and OBCs in education and employment.
 - **Example:**
 - **Reservation policies in education and jobs** under Articles 15(4) and 16(4).
- **Universal Access to Basic Needs (Health, Education, and Social Security):**
 - Ethical governance necessitates providing basic necessities like **education, healthcare, and social security.**
 - Utilitarianism justifies welfare schemes like **PDS and free healthcare** for maximum societal benefit.
 - **India's Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 21A**(Right to Education) and **Article 47:** Duty of the state to improve public health and nutrition.
 - **Example:**
 - **National Education Policy (NEP 2020)** promotes inclusive education.
 - **Ayushman Bharat (PMJAY)** provides free health insurance to vulnerable sections.
- **Transparency, Accountability, and Participatory Governance**
 - Ethical governance requires **transparency, accountability, and active citizen participation** in decision-making.
 - **India's Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Right to Information (RTI Act, 2005)** strengthens transparency.
 - **Panchayati Raj (73rd & 74th Amendments)** promotes decentralized governance.
 - **Example:** Social audits under **MGNREGA**, participatory governance models in Kerala.

Challenges in Fulfilling Ethical Obligations

- **Implementation Gaps:** Welfare schemes often face inefficiency and corruption (**e.g., leakages in PDS**).
- **Social Inequalities:** Despite affirmative action, caste and gender-based discrimination persist. (Indian women earn only **Rs 40 for every Rs 100 earned by men**)
- **Bureaucratic Red Tape:** Administrative inefficiencies slow down welfare delivery. (A recent MGNREGA report highlights workers' grievances over **corruption, delayed wages, lack of work, and bureaucratic hurdles in accessing entitlements.**)

Conclusion

For a welfare state to fulfill its ethical obligations, **governance must be rooted in fairness, dignity, and inclusivity. As B.R. Ambedkar** rightly said, "**The progress of any society depends on how it treats its weakest sections.**" Ethical governance in a welfare state must, therefore, **prioritize justice and empowerment over mere administration.**