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Q6

(a) What were the major teachings of Guru Nanak? Explain their relevance in the contemporary world. (b) Explain the term social capital. How does it enhance good governance?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · GS IV · 10 marks · Ethics and Human Interface

Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in-human actions; dimensions of ethics; ethics - in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators; role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.

Core demand of the question

- (a) State the major teachings of **Guru Nanak** and their relevance today
- (b) Explain social capital and how it enhances good governance

Revision summary

Guru Nanak taught one God, rejection of caste, honest labour, sharing, **langar**, and welfare of all.

Those teachings still judge communal hate, bribes and unpaid hunger.

Social capital is trust, reciprocity and networks that make cooperation possible.

It helps good governance through participation, social audit and lower transaction costs.

Bonding groups can exclude; bridging and linking capital are what a constitutional State needs.

Introduction

Guru Nanak's teaching is a public ethic of one God, honest work and equality. Social capital is the trust and networks that let people cooperate. Both still sit inside Indian governance.

Body

(a) Major teachings of **Guru Nanak and relevance today**

- **Guru Nanak taught Ik Onkar:** there is one divine reality, so sectarian hatred of another's worship has no spiritual ground.
- He rejected caste ranking and priestly monopoly, insisting that dignity does not follow birth.
- **Naam Japna, Kirat Karo and Vand Chakko form a three-fold discipline:** remember the truth, earn by honest labour, and share what is earned.
- **Langar, the community kitchen, made equality edible:** people sit in one line without caste or rank.
- He criticised empty ritual when it replaced truthful living, and he spoke for women's dignity against the habit of calling her inferior.
- Sarbat da bhala, the wish for the welfare of all, turns personal piety into a social aim.

- **Relevance today:** communal polarisation fails **Ik Onkar**; a bribe economy fails Kirat Karo; hunger beside surplus fails Vand Chakko and **langar**.
- Honest work is an anti-corruption ethic that does not wait for a new statute.
- Gender justice and a common kitchen for disaster relief are Nanak's teaching in present administration.
- Inter-faith respect is not courtesy only; it is the constitutional fraternity that his one-God teaching supports.

(b) Social capital and good governance

- Social capital is the stock of trust, norms of reciprocity, and networks that help people cooperate without a contract for every act.
- **Robert Putnam** stressed associations and civic trust; James Coleman stressed obligations inside a community; Pierre Bourdieu noted that networks can also exclude.
- Bonding social capital ties similar people; bridging social capital links across caste, class and religion; linking social capital connects citizens to the State.
- Good governance needs participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness and accountability. Those qualities are cheaper where people already trust one another and the office.
- Self-help groups, cooperatives, resident welfare associations and a working gram sabha are social capital that can audit a ration shop or a road.
- Social audit under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005** uses village networks to check muster rolls.
- High trust reduces the need for a bribe to "get the file moving" and raises the shame cost of cheating a neighbour.
- **The same networks can become capture:** a caste panchayat or a closed club can exclude women and minorities. Governance must build bridging and linking capital, not only bonding clubs.
- An officer enhances social capital by keeping promises, publishing information, inviting hearing, and not treating every association as an enemy.
- Digital public goods help when they add to local trust; they fail when they replace every human network with a password the poorest cannot use.

Flow diagram

Guru Nanak -> Ik Onkar equality
 Guru Nanak -> Honest work and sharing
 Social capital -> Trust and networks
 Trust and networks -> Good governance
 Honest work and sharing -> Good governance

Conclusion

Guru Nanak's teaching is one God, honest work, sharing and equality, which still judges hate, graft and hunger. Social capital is trust and cooperation. It enhances good governance when it is bridging and open, and it harms governance when it is only a closed group.

Facts & figures

Ik Onkar

Guru Nanak's affirmation of one divine reality, used as a ground for rejecting sectarian supremacy.

Kirat Karo, Vand Chakko, Naam Japna

The Sikh ethical triad of honest work, sharing, and remembrance of truth, associated with Nanak's path.

Langar

The community kitchen in which people eat in one line without caste rank, a living practice of equality.

Robert Putnam

His work treated civic associations and generalised trust as social capital that supports democratic performance.

MGNREGA social audit

The **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005** provides for social audit, which uses local networks to check public works.

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