**GP Term 3 – Essays – Topic 7: Social Issues**

**Essay Question 1**

Is it really possible for your society to achieve inclusiveness?

**Essay Question 2**

How far is elitism a problem in your society?

**Essay Question 3**

How far would you agree that the only divide worth addressing is the rich and poor divide?

Essay Question 4

The best way to solve poverty is through the proliferation of education. Do you agree?

**Essay Question 1**

**Is it really possible for your society to achieve inclusiveness?**

**Do you agree structure?**

**Introduction (1)**

**Main body – Opposing View (1) / Rebuttal (1) (prove why the opposing view is wrong) / supporting view (2 to 3 paragraphs)**

**Conclusion**

Analysis of the question:

Students are required to derive a good description of the meaning of inclusiveness, which can be examined from the various aspects of the society, and assess the diverse approaches that the state has taken to work towards this aim. In doing so, they must consider how these approaches interact with fundamental characteristics of our society (to be identified).

source of information -

Possible – policies are effective, nature of the society, social life

impossible – frictions in the policies, nature of the society, values and behaviours of the society

Other considerations:

* “inclusiveness” - accepting and catering for the interest and welfare of all members of society - inclusive of your ideas, your welfare, way of life
* The notion of really – realistic development in society
* “your society” – Singapore
* Categories of discussion / evaluation:
  + Political
  + Economic
  + Social – education
  + cultural – ethnicity, religion
* Nature of the question: DYA

Introduction (general observation, perspective, stand)

When Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong mentioned the notion of an inclusive society, he was aspiring to shape our society to move towards the mindset to accept and cater the interests and welfare of all members in our country. Although we cannot deny that this aspiration is of noble meaning, it is criticized by some as a utopian vision as Singapore still faces many thorny issues and inherent complexities that may undermine our efforts for this achievement. Given a closer examination of the context of the society of Singapore, this essay will support the view that it is not possible for the society to achieve inclusiveness.

Main Body (Opposing view, rebuttal and supporting view)

**Counterpoint**

TS: Some may say that…. /for those who are idealistic, they believe that

It is possible for Singapore to achieve inclusiveness as people might be willing to **defy their self-interest and fundamental instincts for the interest of the society.**

EL - build a national identity -  a sense of belonging / common bond - commonly accepted that bond is valuable - sufficiently valuable to forgo self-interest and / or fundamental instincts - willingness to sacrifice for common good - aspire to ensure all fellow members of our society are included and well taken care of.

EG -

* Universal acceptance of taxes and wealth transfers
  + Income tax
  + ABSD / SSD
  + Workfare
  + GST vouchers etc.
* Universal (generally) acceptance of redistributive measures
  + HDB as programme of land and housing redistribution for easier access by lower income--generally accepted by diverse Singaporeans with few objections (in fact, object when not effective enough)
    - CPF housing grant, AHG, lower-income have further subsidies as well as subsidies on utilities and S&CC
    - Poor singles - SSSS (highly subsidised 2 room flats for as low as $6000)
* Willingness to sacrifice personal time and energy for national / common benefit
  + National Service--for the general public benefit

LS: This willingness to prioritise the common good over self-interest and instinct makes it possible for our people to act in a way that will engender inclusiveness in Singapore.

**Rebuttal**

TS:

The claim above assumes that the sense of belonging to Singapore among the Singapore population is sufficiently strong to compel them to override their self-interest and fundamental instincts. This is empirically of doubtful accuracy.

EL:

belonging / common identity needs to be sufficiently strong to displace potent forces of self-interest and fundamental instinct - Singapore has had limited history - diverse population + “great affective divide” as result of policy direction - limited shared experience and sentiments - binding force not great enough to displace - as long as not displaced, will prevent attainment of inclusiveness /

**The world is more tolerant of racial diversity than intellectual diversity.**

EG:

* Mass (traditional and social) media - lack of support for and high degree of toxic criticism of the state
* Reflection of clear educational (academic / uni v.s. vocational / poly + ite) and sociocultural (urbanites v.s. heartlanders) divide in social dynamics and media- shows how Singaporeans are not willing to remove social boundaries, even in the name of national interest.
* Lack of identification with Singapore, lack of the “Singapore identity’s” pulling power to prevent outward migration (42% want to migrate--Ipsos, 2016)

there is still a high degree of social divide that will undermine the social cohesiveness - less sense of sharing and self-sacrifice

LS:

The doubtful power and acceptance of the “Singapore identity”, whatever it might constitute, makes it unlikely to be effective in compelling our people to look past their own interests and instincts, making our support of inclusiveness purely theoretical, and its attainment practically impossible.

**Supporting view -  why it is impossible to achieve inclusiveness?**

**Point 1**

TS:

The complexity of agreeing on the common level of welfare to be shared will make it hard for a society like Singapore to develop this sense of inclusiveness

EL:

inclusiveness a theoretical concept - needs specific practical definition to implement - what level of economic welfare, social consideration etc - what even constitutes certain forms of inclusiveness e.g. social inclusiveness - not easily agreed upon - depends on background, cultural factors, etc. - if not agreed upon, both policymakers and people will be embroiled in definitional debate - no progress will be made

EG:

* Egs of varied ideas of “inclusion”
  + Economic:
    - economic inclusion: provision of opportunities? welfare payments? allocation of jobs?
    - if welfare, how much and in what form?
    - These disputes make it difficult to craft economic redistributive policy with truly wide-ranging support.
  + Social:
    - social inclusion: all seen as the same, with difference de-emphasised? all different but equally treated? Is the latter even possible?
    - People follow their own yardsticks, and are unwilling to go where they perceive as above and beyond.

LS:

Until and unless there is broad agreement on the nature and extent of inclusiveness as it will be implemented, it is not possible for Singapore to attain inclusiveness, as all parties will merely be embroiled in unconstructive definitional debate.

**Point 2**

TS:

The practical difficulties of making policy to bridge pre-existing social, economic and cultural divides makes it difficult to create and reinforce an inclusive society. (inherent issues and frictions in the introduction of policies)

EL:

even if common definition agreed upon – inclusive policy often runs against many other considerations, many of which “sacred cows” – inherent frictions of policy making and political decisions - difficulty to balance such considerations and still move towards inclusiveness - also hard to make sure inclusive policies do not clash with each other - difficulty of policymaking means little effective policy - limited movement towards inclusiveness (hard to accommodate the interest of all / difficult to enforce the will of the society for all)

EG:

* economic policy: need to consider *inter alia* prevention of inflationary pressure, maintenance of incentive to work (inasmuch as it is dampened by distributive measures), international economic competitiveness etc. See severe disagreements internationally on suitable sum of minimum wage,
* high cost of financing social spending – LHL said about high social spending in the future
* social policy: can neither disfavour nor favour any particular group, and can be seen to do neither. also, both equal opportunity and affirmative action approaches have social costs (dissatisfaction over structural disadvantage, and unfairness in differentiating requirements respectively)

**Point 3**

TS:

The commonly accepted link between merit and desert is at odds with inclusiveness, making it difficult to achieve the latter if the former is still cherished. (inherited dogmatic values)

meritocracy contradicts with the outcome of elitism

EL:

Inclusiveness requires assumption that all are deserving of some things regardless of unique characteristics - fundamental dignity etc etc - in Singapore, meritocracy established as ideological foundation, one of the most sacred cows - extended in popular and political consciousness to go beyond allocation of opportunities - now includes moral justification - correlation between merit and desert - inclusiveness goes against this dearly held belief  as it does not incentivise efforts - likely to meet insurmountable resistance - **the essence of inclusiveness which promotes equality contradicts the principles of meritocracy which will create inequality.**

EG:

* popular belief that the educated are more “deserving” of respect or even esteem -  a cause of class divide based on education hierarchy
* popularity of the view that the poor are less deserving

LS:

With such a key pillar of our national consciousness so inimical to any progress towards inclusiveness, it is unlikely that any genuine effort to foster inclusiveness will gain either moral legitimacy or support from all societal strata.

Conclusion (retrospective summary, opinionated suggestion)

While it is tempting to adopt an excessively optimistic view of the strength of Singapore’s national identity and its appeal and pull as an imagined community, and to consequently overestimate Singaporeans’ willingness to sacrifice their practical benefit in favour of the ideal of inclusiveness, such a view is dangerously unrealistic. Ultimately, the presence and persistence of social divisions in Singapore, the sheer difficulty of policymaking without being counterproductive and the sacred cow of meritocracy, insidiously reinterpreted as desert by merit, make it nigh on impossible for Singapore to achieve inclusivity.

**Essay Question 2**

**How far is elitism a problem in your society?**

**(extent of agreement)**

Analysis of the question:

The focus of the question is to assess the issue of elitism and its problems that it will impose on our society. There is also the need to examine the degree of this detrimental impact. To do so, students need to examine the extent of impact by depicting how the detriments can be avoided or the benefits of elitism. This will answer the requirements of the question on the degree of the problem of elitism on the society.

Structure of discussion

1. Examine why elitism is a problem in our society?
2. Evaluate why it will not be a problem under certain circumstances?

(based on the possible benefits and how problems can be minimized)

1. Analysis – which factor will determine its degree of detriments

Introduction (observation, development of proposition, the extent of agreement to the proposition) /- method of discussion

It is inevitable for an education system of a society to evolve a state of elitism when the notion of meritocracy is emphasized as the society will develop a group of intellectuals who are with better capabilities and acumen to lead the society. However, the debatable issue lies in the controversy whether this group of individuals or the notion of the elitism will be of great benefits to the society and its members. Unfortunately, most of the time, the notion of elitism fails to deliver and the society went through suppression and oppression and this gives rise to the conventional thinking that elitism is problematic for the society. Thus, it is critical to examine whether the degree of the problems elitism will create in our modern society and to do so, we need to examine how elitism is affecting the various aspects of our society.

(method of discussion)

Main Body

**Perspective 1: Why elitism will be a problem to your society?**

Point 1 – creates a social and political hierarchy which will lead to social divide (negative effect of a hierarchy in our society)

EL – how this will occur? / why this will be a problem for your society? (ranking, classifying and dividing) – lower class will experience deprivation of resources and opportunities / high degree of concern for self -interest – class struggle as stated by Karl Marx – fight for opportunities especially when leadership becomes corrupted and self-centred

EG: How is this seen in Singapore? education divide – a class different – economic inequality / different way of life – the more globalized group and the group who are domestic oriented – heart-landers – income disparity and social status – LHL – rise of a disenfranchised society – if there is absence of inclusiveness – the interests of the educated individuals are prioritized over the less educated individuals

(lack of understanding among the different groups of people -mistrust and apprehension – difficult for the elite to rule and the masses’ respect for the elite)

Point 2 – abuse of the social and political leadership which will create social discontent, undermining social fabrics and harmony

EL – possess opportunities, take advantage, lack of ethical guidelines

EG – corruption cases like City Harvest,

LS

**Perspective 2: Why elitism will not be a problem to the society?**

Point 1 – the need of social and political hierarchy to lead the society and manage the society proves that this social divide is modicum of concern to the society

* state of anarchy – no ruling body – masses will rule the county -

Point 2 – regulation of the governing estates in a democratic nation will prevent its abuse and the development of a disenfranchised society

check and balance in the society by the executive branch, the judiciary, legislatures, the press and public vigilantism

**Perspective 3: Analysis on the extent of the problematic impact of elitism**

**In view of these perspectives on the issue of elitism, it imperative to know the key factors that will determine whether it is a problem or not.**

Point 1 – The notion of elitism is essential for the society to function in an organised way but its detriments will only surface when there is the absence of the proper code of values and conduct to guide it. Its problems lie in how this elite group of people are shaped and developed. (the leader nurtured by Confucianism is guided by the ethics to protect the interests of the society will lead to the progress of the society even for those who are below them)

Conclusion (show the proposition and examine the extent of agreement)

Leadership is important for the society to organise the resources for producing goods and services for the society and guide the proper development of the masses. Elitism is the notion that will serve these functions, however, the abuses will surface if there is no correct development of the elites. The problems of elitism will be of great scale to the society as we can observe the downfalls of great society due to unethical elitism. Thus, this au fait nurturing of the elitism in society in the key in assessing the degree of problem or benefits of elitism in our modern society.

Introduction

Main body:

1 supporting view

1 contrasting view

1 – perspective analysis

Conclusion