GP Essay Test 1

1. Press Freedom. Is it a good thing?

2. Not everyone is entitled to freedom of Speech. Do you agree?

3. To what extent does science and technology undermine the youths in your society?

4. Marriage is not relevant in modern society. Do you agree?

5. ‘City life is becoming increasingly unsafe.’ Discuss.

6. ‘More so now than ever, we need to live a life of simplicity.’ Discuss.

**Question 7**

**How tolerant is your society of alternative views and lifestyles?**

**Essay Discussion for Science and Technology**

**Q1) Technology Advancements always brings about social equality. What is your view?**

**Requirement of the question**

* Need to broaden the understanding of social equality – seen in terms of equal opportunities, absence of social discrimination, social and political rights (equal social status /freedom of expression)
* Need to examine the influence of technology on these stated areas and derive the argument whether there is social equality based on these areas of social equality

**Type of question – agreement**

**Introduction**

Social equality has always been the utopian view on how society should be developed and many civilizations have attempted to achieve this humanistic aim through different social or political ideological models but fails in their discourse. As the society modernizes and become more technologically developed, there is growing expectation that technology may be the pivotal development that will eventually bring about the realization of our utopian society based on social equality, given its extensive influence on the society. However, in my opinion, such an expectation is unrealistic and a wishful thinking as the notion of social equality is a complex development in the real world.

**Main body**

Opposing View

Technocrats rationalize their arguments that technology will bring about social equality as they believe that the benefits of technological advancement will empower the individuals to enable them to preserve their social rights and status to maintain their equality. The proliferation of information through media technological network will equip individuals with more knowledge about their civic and political rights as cable and internet platform will be the venue for people to assess more information. The fall of the aristocrat class and the rise of a working class is another evident to support how technological knowledge can be the source of an egalitarian society that is founded on principle of random social status, but a social status based on opportunity of development made possible by skill and technological development. Over the years, many countries has become republics and the workers can form trade unions like NTUC in Singapore (National Trade Union Congress) and all these developments prove why individuals are more equal as the working class has their rights protected.

Rebuttal

However, such development is not without its restriction and constraints as trade unions like NTUC are often manipulated and controlled by the ruling class and in the case of Singapore, the ruling party.

Supporting View 1.

In reality, social equality cannot be eradicated by technology as our society is unequal due to the entrenched cultural values that set an unequal framework that undermines the vulnerable group or a special class of the society.

(how women are treated in Afghanistan?)

Supporting View 2

It is also difficult to empower the individuals with the technological knowhow and list of equipment to help them raise their capacity to gain their rights to overcome social inequality

Skill deprivation that leads higher rate of unemployment in Europe.

Supporting View 3

Technological advancement can never be the source of motivation that propels an individual to fight for their rights for social equality as technology is only a means, not the inspiration.

Gandhi and Martin Luther King’s fight for the rights of the poeple

**Conclusion**

In sum, we expect technological advancement as the means to solve our problems as we advance in our civilization. Technology is often seen as the solution as it is a device that we have invented to curb perilous predicaments we have. The truth is that technology has its limitation and human issues like social equality is more complex and difficult to solve. We need a deep and meticulous approach to study these social issues and ensure that we can solve these problems without one-sided reliance on technology.

**Question**

**How tolerant is your society of alternative views and lifestyles?**

Keywords

* ‘tolerant’ refers to the willingness to accept or put up with
* ‘alternative views’ refer to the different ideas and perspectives of individuals
* ‘alternative lifestyles’ refer to diverse way of life, such as habits, attitudes, beliefs, moral standards, gender identification and sexual orientation

Question Requirements

* ‘Extent of agreement’ (EOA) question
* Examine the impacts of alternative views and lifestyles on the society
* Focus on two opposing perspectives
  + Why society is not tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles
  + Why society is tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles

Introduction

**Overview:** In modern societies, the desire and attainment of progress of the human civilisation has shaped the views and lifestyles of individuals from different communities. After addressing the basic needs and concerns, humans began to consider adopting various lifestyles and accepting new perspectives to achieve fulfilling lives.

**Given View:** Some believe that the Singapore society has become more tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles as the city-state has progressed past the maturity stage to become more accepting towards differences amongst individuals, creating a melting pot that promotes tolerance and acceptance of diverse views.

**Contrasting View:** In contrast, others argue that Singapore remains intolerant of alternative views and lifestyles due to the conservative mindsets and behaviours of the majority that hamper the development of a liberal and receptive society.

**Approach:** In view of these polarising perspectives, this essay needs to **examine the various ways on how our diverse society interacts and develops from dimensional perspectives to derive the degree of tolerance of the society in view of a diverse society.**

Main Body

**Given View 1: Explain how Singapore is tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles - acceptance of alternative religious and cultural values**

**TS:** From the cultural and religious perspective, some argue that Singapore is a tolerant society as the government advocates multiculturalism and multi-religiosity, which have shaped the beliefs and behaviours of individuals to be more accepting towards diversity.

**EL:** Political leaders have stressed the importance of tolerance and mutual respect after learning from the historical lessons of ethnic clashes that threatened social fabric. As such, the continual emphasis on respect for diversity has been extended to other areas, like the acceptance of alternative views and lifestyles.

**EG:** Following the 1964 racial riots in Singapore, the government has focused its efforts on strengthening racial and religious harmony via legislative means, such as the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act and Sedition Act, which reinforce the importance of respecting religious and cultural diversity. Similarly, citizens from various ethnic communities are tolerant of customs, such as the Hungry Ghost Festival in which the Chinese burn paper offerings in metal bins located near residential areas.

**LS:** Hence, it is clear that the state-approved ideology of multiculturalism and multi-religiosity has been effective in creating a tolerant Singapore society towards differing views and lifestyles.

**Extent of Agreement 1: Explain how Singapore is not tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles - clash of cultural and religious values**

**TS:** However, such a view holds a limited perspective as the proliferation of religious values and beliefs have sparked off controversial debates that indicated the absence of tolerance towards ideas that deviate from personal beliefs.

**EL:** From the educational viewpoint, the imposition of a specific religious beliefs on the society has been met with strong rejection by the affected parties as they have perceived such actions as the infringement of personal space, particularly the clash of differing views.

**EG:** In 2014, a junior college student, Agatha Tan, published a letter to her school principal, expressing concerns over the a school workshop organised by pro-family Christian charity, Focus on the Family Singapore. Tan’s letter became viral on social media as many local netizens criticised the organiser for perpetuating sexism and gender stereotypes. In response, the Ministry of Education (MOE) ceased external vendor services for sexuality education workshops and emphasised that it would ensure the secularity of its learning curriculum.

**LS:** Hence, it can be observed that the society have different opinions on how our moral yardstick would be and may not see eye to eye on other alternative values while the government understands the significance of secular values.

**Given View 2: Explain how Singapore is tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles - acceptance of alternative family values and lifestyles**

**TS:** From the family perspective, some argue that the Singapore society is tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles as the proliferation of education amidst the modernised economy has led to the growing acceptance of diverse views amongst the population.

**EL:** Given that the Singapore government places economic development as the top priority, many Singaporeans share similar sentiments, seen in terms of pursuing formal education to improve employability. Furthermore, the openness of the Singapore economy to external influences has led to the influx of alternative views, in contrast to the traditional belief of marriages. Therefore, interaction between local and external views has led to the gradual acceptance towards other concepts of family.

**EG 1:** According to a 2016 General Household Survey, 70% of the Singapore residents in the mid to late 20s chose to remain single due to their focus on career development over marriage. Associate Professor Paulin Straughan of National University of Singapore (NUS) pointed out that there is strong pressure to perform in their jobs due to potential immediate rewards, like promotion. As such, some youths preferred singlehood over married life.

**EG 2:** In 2014, the National Library Board (NLB) withdrew two children’s books due to complaints from members of the public that these books could degrade family values. For instance, one of the two books, titled “And Tango Makes Three” featured two male penguins that behaved like a couple and raised a young. In response, the NLB saga sparked off social activism amongst some Singaporeans, including members of the arts community. Some commented that the books would have been a good opportunity to teach children diverse family structures, like single-parent families and same-sex couples.

**LS:** Therefore, this shows that Singapore has become more tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles pertaining to family.

**Extent of Agreement 2: Explain how Singapore is not tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles - resistance to alternative family values and lifestyles**

**TS:** However, such a view lacks depth as the Singapore society remained intolerant towards alternative family values that are deemed as threats to the traditional and conventional norms.

**EL:** Given that Singapore has been open to the effects of globalisation, the increasingly-educated population has been affected by influences that introduce alternative family values that deviate from traditional structures and lifestyle practices. As traditional values still remain the bedrock of societal beliefs, many individuals are hesitant in embracing diversity wholeheartedly.

**EG 1:** Following the landmark decision made by India’s supreme court to repeal Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in September 2018, there were calls by individuals in Singapore to request the repeal of Section 377A of the Penal Code. In response, many religious organisations have publicly rejected the motion for repeal. For instance, the National Council of Churches of Singapore made a statement that the repeal may lead to the ‘normalisation and promotion’ of a morally-undesirable lifestyle. Also, there were two opposing camps that petitioned to repeal or keep the law.

**EG 2:** In 2014, Islamic religious teacher Noor Deros initiated a ‘Wear White’ online campaign that urged Muslims to don white-coloured clothing to protest against homosexuality and protect traditional family values. Deros’ campaign was organised in response to the ‘Pink Dot’ campaign, which advocated ‘the freedom to live’ regardless of sexual orientation. Clearly, the emergence of opposing camps that pushed for the preservation of pro-family values amongst the conservations and the liberal values by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community has shown that lack of unanimity and tolerance.

**LS:** Therefore, such controversial debates have revealed the underlying perceptions of the public towards alternative family views and lifestyles that were deemed unacceptable, proving that the level of tolerance is minimal.

**Given View 3: Explain how Singapore is tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles - acceptance of alternative social values and lifestyles**

**TS:** From the social standpoint, Singapore may be increasingly tolerant of alternative social values as the changing demographic patterns of the society have shaped newer definitions of success and happiness.

**EL:** In particular, amongst the younger segment of the society, more individuals have diverged from the track of accepting and upholding traditional values, which are widely advocated by the older generations. As such, the youths have chose to discover their own purpose in life.

**EG:** During a parliamentary debate in May 2018, Senior Minister of State, Dr Maliki Osman shared his observation of Singaporean youths, pointing out that the millennials have developed their own definition of success. In contrast to the former definition of the Singaporean dream, which referred to the “5Cs - cash, car, credit card, condominium and country club membership”, youths are more appealed to the “You only live once (YOLO)” attitude as they prefer meaningful experiences than mere tangible material wants.

**LS:** Hence, the shifting focus of alternative social values amongst the youths have shown that the Singapore society is tolerant of diverse perspectives.

**Extent of agreement 3: Explain how Singapore is not tolerant of alternative views and lifestyles - rejection of alternative social values and lifestyles**

**TS:** However, alternative social values are not widely embraced by the older population in Singapore as the perceived incompatibility of the youths’ social values with the traditional beliefs have led to increased social dissatisfaction.

**EG:** According to an online survey conducted by job site Monster.com in July 2017, nearly one-third of young Singaporeans leave their first jobs in less than a year. The reasons for their departure include the lack of career progression and the desire for higher wage. In response to this problem of job-hopping amongst youths, employers expressed their concerns over this social behaviour as they found it unprofessional.

LS: Although the society has modernized, our core traditional values are still entrenched and forged to uphold the status quo on who we are and what we should be holding in a modern society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Singapore has built up a role model for many other cosmopolitan societies to emulate where we have attained racial harmony as we develop tolerance towards racial diversity. However, as society becomes more educated, globalization raises the degree of interaction and social media encourages freedom of expression, a more opined, individualistic and self-centred society evolves and complicates diversity and lower the tolerance towards other alternative views and lifestyles. As stated by Fareed Zakaria, ‘we are more tolerant of racial diversity than intellectual diversity.’ This speaks very clearly about the degree of tolerance Singapore has over alternative views and lifestyle.

**Question 1**

**Is the World today really an unhappy place to live in?**

Nature of the question – do you agree?

Introduction

Main Body

* Opposing view
* Rebuttal to opposing view
* Supporting Views – 3 Paragraphs

Conclusion

**Derivation of thesis and anti-thesis**

* thesis – the world today is really an unhappy place live
* anti-thesis – the world today is not an unhappy place to live , it is a happy pace to live

**Analysis of the question**

* World today – modern society (the way we live, the values and norms, economics, political factors, education, family, environment, health)
* Notion of happiness – manifestation of the notion of happiness, unhappiness)

**(observation, perspectives, stand)**

**thesis – the modern society is a happy place to live in**

**anti-thesis – the modern society is not a happy place to live in**

Life in the modern world is often seen as progressive as we are bestowed with advanced technological development and infrastructures that have made our lives more comfortable, convenient and conducive for living, shaping many to feel that the world today is really a happy place to live in. However, if we observe closer the lives of many dwellers in urbanized cities and developed countries, we will not be surprised to hear a less optimistic and more negative view about their sense of happiness. In view of these diverse opinions, this essay is more inclined to the view that the world today is really an unhappy place to live.

(opposing linking sentence)

For those who are fortunate and live a blissful life, it is quite logical for them to feel that the world is a happy place to live in as they are enjoying the luxuries and comfort of life. They live in the modern era where food is easily accessible if they have the financial means and comfort and safety of their community can be achieved with efficient and advanced infrastructures. Technological advancement has allowed the masses to travel more often, enriching our lives with diverse experiences while the advent of smartphones and social media have provided new forms of entertainments that make life more interesting and less boring. Some are also blessed with good health, talented attributes, more advantaged family environment and cordial and close-knitted relationship. These fortunate developments in the lives of this small group of people in this world will shape their view that the world is a happy place to live in as the various levels of needs in their lives as identified by psychologists like Maslow can be satisfied. When your needs and expectations are met, one will feel hopeful and you will be able to have the capacity to create the ‘good life’ as identified by positive psychologists like Martin Seligman.

(LINKING SENTENCE FOR REBUTTAL)

But such an explanation holds a modicum of truths as not everyone is blessed with such good fortunes or are capable to create ‘the good life’ as life in a modern world is demanding and complex. The comfort and affluent lifestyle does not come cheap and this may be beyond the affordability of the average Joe as 69 of the major cities have higher consumer price index in 2012 as stated by Unhabitat, a research firm. Rising global food prices and resources like oil has contributed to extensive rise in cost of living which will add on the economic burden for the lower income earners whose wage will not be sufficient to sustain their living. This will add pressure on their lives as they need to work longer hours or additional jobs to sustain their living, cutting their time to rest and spend times with their families. We observe how many city dwellers in city like Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing and other major cities complained over housing issues, rising food and transport prices which have made life financially unbearable, shaping the view that the contemporary society is indeed an unhappy place to live in.

Supporting view – linking sentence

Life is also filled with many uneventful and unfortunate moments as we grow older, subjecting us to failures, separation, disappointments, upsets, complexity and crisis and all these adversities will give rise to greater hardship that makes our lives difficult and unpleasant to live. Not everyone is fortunate to be blessed with the mental acumen and social and family supports that will enable them to overcome these inevitable mishaps in their lives and many will succumb to them and fall into a state of depression or despondency that will make life unhappy and unbearable. As reported by Today, the national suicide for Singapore has risen from 8.13 per 100000 residents in 2010 to 10.27 in 2011. There are also a rising number of patients seeking for treatments in Institute of Mental Health. On a whole, our social tensions are rising as life becomes more challenging, creating a dispirited and abject environment. Life cannot be happy and rosy with this bleak mood.

Our world is indeed an unhappy place to live when there is higher degree of competition created by growing population, greater global connectedness and depleting scare resources that will demand individuals to strive to win in this economic competition for resources and benefits. Students now have to compete for limited spaces in education institutions from kindergarten to tertiary places on merit or economic capacity while workers compete for employment and business opportunities for advancement and economic gains. Consequently, people will now have less time, energy and resource to devote to intrinsic development in their lives like social interaction, hobbies and leisure to cultivate a holistic lifestyle with meaningful purposes and amiable relationships. Instead, life has become tensed, trivialized and confrontational as we need to combative and aggressive to survive in a highly competitive environment. This is evidently seen in mega cities like Singapore, New York, Hong Kong and Shanghai where many are seen to be unhappy souls in social surveys about their life. Under such competitive ethos, we can never live a happy life.

As for those who are living in less developed state with rural and improvised background, the world is even more unhappy place to live in as life is tough as they fight against perilous natural difficulties and social and cultural backwardness. Life in these backward or rural regions are deprived of modern amenities to raise their comfort of lives and opportunities for personal and social development are deplorable, forcing many youths to sought life in the city which is equally tough but more hopeful for those who feel bleak in the rural regions as evidently seen in the growth of population in many urbanized cities in China. For these rural folks in less developed nations, employment opportunities are scarce and they are also undermined by dogmatic rural values that may lead to social and gender discrimination where girls are deprived of equal opportunities and rights. Although some may argue that simplicity is the way of life towards happiness, it is never easy to live in ignorance, deprivation and aimless as life is simply too simple to live and thus, a place in this world cannot be happy for the less connected and deprived.

Although the current world political development may have democratized and empowered the individuals with rights through revolutions, legislatures and the proliferation of the mass media, part of the world still experiences political suppression and restraint which will make their world an unhappy place to live in. In many less developed states, the people are living in autocratic states like North Korea and Syria, who are experiencing fear, suppression and restriction. Deprivation of freedom and rights to access for basic resources and equal treatments will definitely shape the world to be an unhappy place to live in. In these states, the absence of democratic and effective governance will give rise to political instability, civil wars and rampant crimes which will threaten the lives of the people. Life in a perilous environment where one is oppressed, and life is threatened will not create a happy environment to live in. Ask the people in Iraq, Somalia and Syria, they will agree to this.

In retrospect, we indeed live in an unhappy world. As we grow older and our world develops, we face with more complex and challenging changes that will lead to more mishaps and misfortunes, shaping our world to be disheartening, dreadful, intolerable and calamitous. However, life goes on, bearable or unbearable, we must continue living and we can shape our mindsets to make our lives as happy as we can. Though we cannot change the world to make it a happy place for us to live in, we can make ourselves happy to live in this unhappy world.