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A Close Study of 'The Argumentative Indian' Through the Lens of History & Culture

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ABSTRACT: "The Argumentative Indian," authored by Amartya Sen, is a significant work that explores the rich history, diverse culture, and intellectual traditions of India. This project aims to conduct a comprehensive study of the book, analyzing its arguments, themes, and insights through the lenses of history and culture. By delving into historical events, socio-cultural contexts, and philosophical underpinnings, this project seeks to understand the profound impact of India's history and culture on its intellectual discourse and democratic ideals as portrayed in Sen's work.

KEYWORDS: Analysing arguments, themes, and insights.

The Background of the Idea of the Book "A Close Study of 'The Argumentative Indian' Through The Lens Of History & Culture"

The Argumentative Indian is a book written by Nobel

Prize winning Indian economist Amartya Sen. It is a collection

of essays that discuss India's history and identity, focusing on the traditions of public debate and intellectual pluralism. Martha Nussbaum says the book "demonstrates the importance of public debate in Indian traditions generally."

The Argumentative Indian has brought together a selection of writings from Sen that outline the need to understand contemporary India in the light of its long argumentative tradition. The understanding and use of this argumentative tradition are critically important, Sen argues, for the success of India's democracy, the defence of its secular politics, the removal of inequalities related to class, caste, gender and community, and the pursuit of sub-continental peace.

Book Insights :

In India, prolixity is not unusual. We can have a lengthy conversation. Nobody has ever come close to matching Krishna Menon's* record for the longest speech ever made at the UN (nine hours non-stop), which was set half a century ago (while Menon was serving as the head of the Indian delegation). Other Indians have reached higher levels of talkativeness. We do enjoy talking.

This behaviour is not new. The Iliad and the Odyssey are usually compared to the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, two classical Sanskrit epics that are enormously lengthier than anything that the modest Homer could produce. In fact, the length of the Mahabharata alone is over seven times that of the combined Iliad and Odyssey.

Ramayana, as well as I recall with great satisfaction how my own life was greatly enhanced when I first came across epics as a restless youngster seeking both intellectual and pure entertainment. However, they move from story to story while weaving their main stories in between, and they are engrossingly packed with conversation, conundrums, and alternate viewpoints. Additionally, we come across a huge number of arguments and refutations dispersed across endless discussions and disagreements.

Dialogue and Significance :

The arguments are frequently pretty substantial as well. For instance, the renowned Bhagavad Gita, a brief segment of the Mahabharata, depicts a struggle between two opposing moral stances: Krishna's stress on doing one's duty and Arjuna's emphasis on avoiding negative repercussions (and fostering positive ones). The discussion takes place just before the Mahabharata's pivotal battle, the great war. Arjuna, the peerless and unbeatable warrior in the army of the good and honourable royal family (the Pandavas), who are going to confront the unjust usurpers (the Kauravas), witnesses the two armies preparing for battle and expresses grave misgivings about the wisdom of what they are doing.



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Two Sides of Mahabharata :

However, the epic Mahabharata itself presents each of the two opposing views in the form of a sequential discussion with great care and compassion. In fact, the awful desolation that the post-battle and post-carnage land—primarily the Indo-Gangetic plain—seems to face towards the end of the Mahabharata can even be interpreted as a sort of validation of Arjuna's deep scepticism. Whatever the Bhagavad Gita's intended "message" may be, Arjuna's counterarguments are not really defeated. There is still a compelling argument for moving forward while also "faring well."

J. Robert Oppenheimer, the American team leader who led the development of the ultimate "weapon of mass destruction" during the Second World War, was motivated to use Krishna's statements ('I am the supreme being') as his own. The power of the first nuclear explosion that man created. Oppenheimer, the scientist, could very well find justification in his technical dedication to produce a bomb for what was obviously the right side, similar to the guidance Arjuna had received regarding his duty as a warrior fighting for a just cause. Oppenheimer later reflected on, even criticised, his own actions, saying: "When you see something that is technically sweet, you go ahead and do it and you argue about what to do about it only after you have had your technical success



Gender, Caste and Voice :

However, it is important to consider if the tradition of debates and fights has been restricted to a particular segment of the Indian population—possibly just the male elite.

Of course, it would be unrealistic to anticipate that argumentative involvement would be divided equally across all demographic groups, but India has historically had significant disparities along the lines of gender, class, caste, and community (more on which will follow). The argumentative tradition's social relevance would be severely constrained if underprivileged groups were successfully excluded from participation. But this story is considerably more nuanced than a broad generalisation can convey.

Argumentation and Democracy:

Examination of the connection between argumentation, democracy, and governance in India's political history.

Analysis of the role of argumentation in shaping the Indian Constitution and democratic institutions.

Exploration of the challenges and benefits of an argumentative culture in a diverse democratic society.

Contemporary Relevance and Critique:

Evaluation of the contemporary relevance of 'The Argumentative India' in the context of India's socio-political landscape.

Critical examination of Sen's Arguments and their implications for India's future.

Discussion of the book's reception, impact, and potential limitation

Exploring Profound Themes: A Close Study of "The Argumentative Indian' Through the Lens Of History

The book is divided into four sections called "Voice and Heterodoxy", "Culture and Communication", "Politics and Protest", and "Reason and Identity," each of which has a connected essay. The first portion examines the tradition of diverse discourse that has existed in India since the time of Buddha and earlier monarchs like Ashoka. The second section examines India's relationships with other cultures, such as the West and China, with a focus on the harmonious and intellectually stimulating interactions between the two great Asian civilisations. It also seeks to restore Rabindranath Tagore's reputation as an intellectual polymath who combines spiritual and political ideas. The third segment examines class tensions and critiques social injustices in India society in Indian society as well as we justifications offered for them. Finally, the book examines contemporary liberal and secular societies in an Indian text context.

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