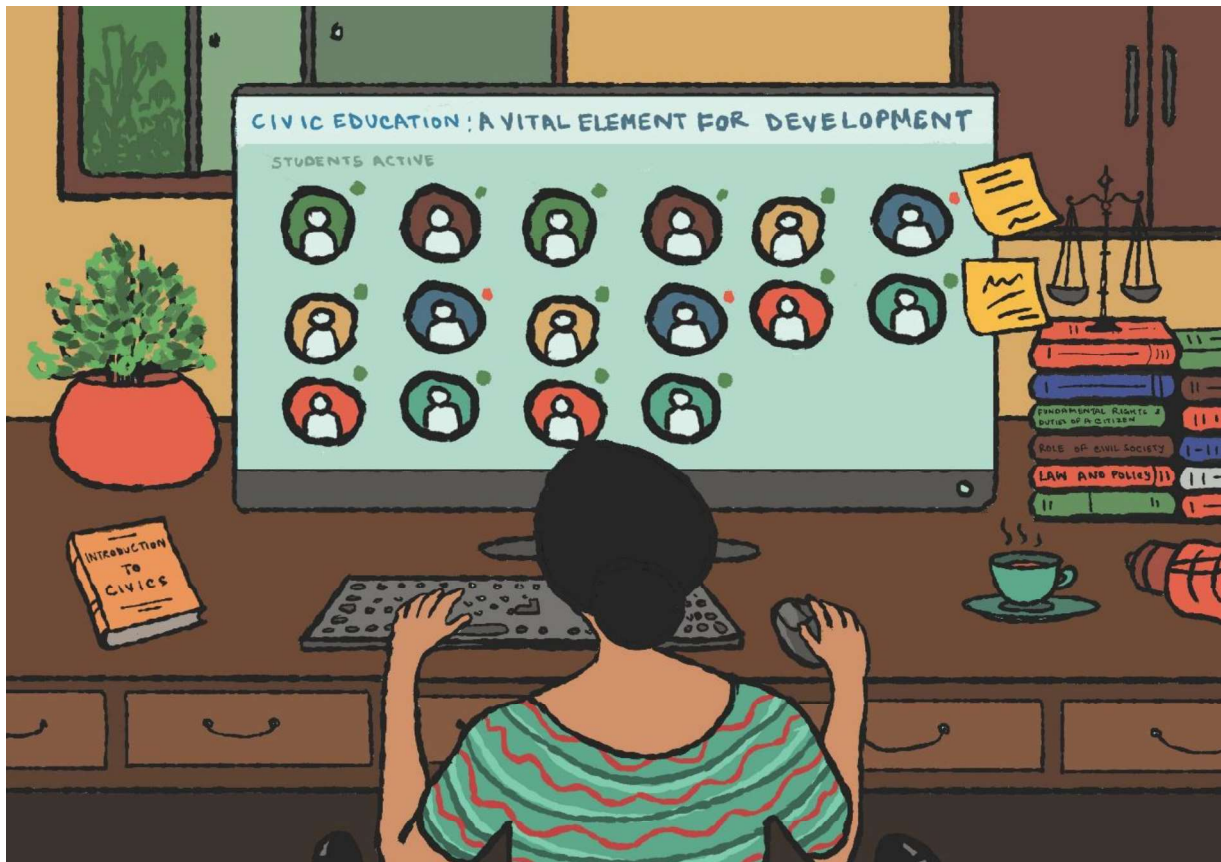


Civic Education: A Vital Element for Development

~ Sujata C

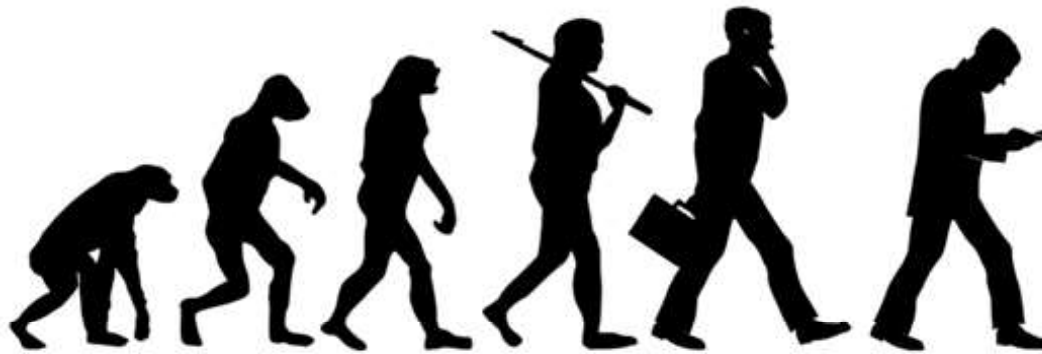


India is the largest democracy in the world, and democracies require active participation of its people. Every election shows how indifferent people are to their responsibility as citizens and their lack of awareness of the power they wield as citizens of a democratic country. This is where the role of civic education becomes so crucial in the 21st century in order to rid society of this apathy and indifference towards civic issues, and teachers have a major influence in instilling that spirit of community in the minds of students.



Civic education needs to go beyond the textbook and should take a leaf from the real world. This would make it relatable and thereby help to involve and engage the youth. The society that we see today has come a long way from what it was a century ago. How does society evolve? A society evolves when like-minded

people come together to discuss mutual problems, challenge situations and prepare a roadmap for the betterment of the society. Rome, as they say, was not built in a day. Active involvement of people, constructive discussions and collaborative working go a long way in building a healthy society.



Importance of civic education: Exposure to civic norms and responsibilities lays the foundation of a good citizen. People with civic awareness are more likely to participate in the election procedure – exercise their right to cast vote and elect responsible leaders necessary for a strong democracy. They are less likely to come under the influence of negative campaigning and would have the strength to stand up against a wrong. They would know the importance of diversity, be more tolerant, and help form inclusive societies.



An informed citizen would know how governments function and how to work with the government in order to bring about positive changes. The potential of civics education must be fully exploited in our schools so that we can prepare the future generation to become conscious and responsible citizens and to strengthen the fabric of a democratic nation.

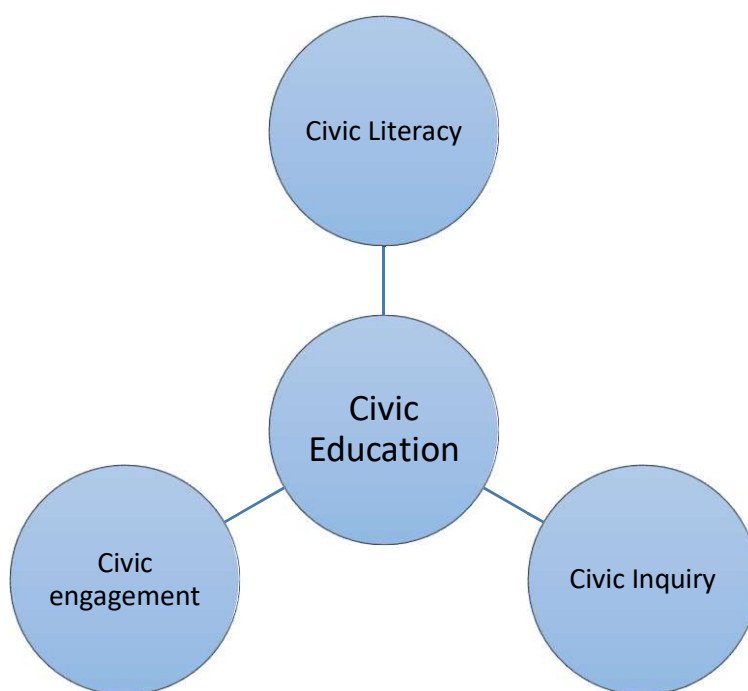
The strength of a nation is tested in times of crises. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is one such testing time. It has brought the world to its knees and



weakened societies in many ways. It has exposed the flaws and inequalities in the system. The privileged urban population has been able to come through largely unscathed, thanks to technology and work from home facilities. But certain sections of the society like the migrant labourers and small

businesses have been badly affected. Responsible citizens of a democracy can help in such a situation by asking themselves what they can do for the society. They can volunteer their services by forming a group of like-minded people to make valuable contributions for the good of the society at large.

Teachers who teach civic education, therefore, should try to cover topics like civic literacy, civic inquiry, civic engagement and civil societies.



Civic literacy is having the knowledge and the skills necessary to bring about change in the community. Civic inquiry involves the ability to question, probe and investigate in matters of the society. Civic engagement is the participation of an individual or a group of individuals in matters of public concern. It is undertaken with the goal of improving quality of life. Working for a cause always makes life more meaningful. Altruism is an inborn trait in all children, but as they grow older and watch the world around them, it fades. In a world that is becoming increasingly self-centred, it is important to move people out of this mind-set and get them to start thinking about others – family, society, country, and the world. By volunteering time for others one gets a sense of purpose in life, and feels positive and productive. Teachers may illustrate the benefits of volunteering to older students by explaining how it will help them in the future when they start working. They can highlight how volunteering gives an opportunity for learning through hands-on experience and train for the future.

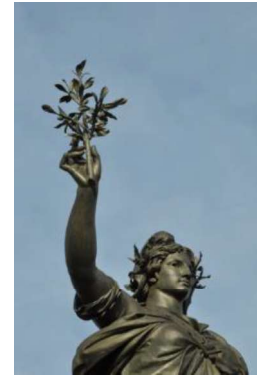
It makes the volunteer realise that they can make a difference.



Civic engagement helps students develop many skills – intellectual, research, social, analytical, and critical thinking. Students will begin to get an idea of what they like or don't like and what they are good at. It will help them to assess their skills and move forward.

Civil society: Civil societies are a wide range of communities, non-government organisations and volunteer groups linked by a common interest of community development. They are a powerful way for citizens or the common man to engage with lawmakers. They fill a gap that exists in society between the government and the commercial sector and form the third sector of society working mostly not for profit. They hold institutions to account, make demands for transparency, give voice to the voiceless and empower those on the fringes of the society. They also function as pressure groups and help shape policies. It is for this reason that they are either wooed or witch hunted by government organisations.

Civil societies have a rich history that goes back to the Age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. They had the backing of profound thinkers of the time like Socrates, Aristotle and Plato.



Problems faced by civil societies: Civil society organisations are generally bootstrapped and rely on funding from various sources. Funding is one of the main challenges faced by such organisations and they come under scrutiny for this very reason. Those who finance such organisations would want to see the benefits of doing so and that runs the chances of the mission getting side-tracked by the bias of the beneficiaries.

Response to the pandemic: How can civil societies help cope during a pandemic and in post-pandemic recovery? The role of civil societies comes into sharp focus during a crisis. The pandemic has thrown up some unexpected problems, like long periods of lockdown have resulted in a spike in domestic violence or mental health issues. The frequent hand washing protocol is leading to a water crisis in many areas. Those without access to smartphones are facing problems at work where they are being asked to download apps that indicate their safety status. Online classes are proving to be a challenge for those who do not have access to computers, smartphones or the Internet. Witnessing the problems faced by migrant labourers during the pandemic and the absence of state level policies, civil societies are pressing for migration policies.



Exploitation is common during a crisis. Some organisations are keeping an eye out on any violation of rights. Schools and colleges are waiving exams and taking internal assessment to base the final grades on. Civil societies must scrutinise these to check for fairness and ensure that it does not put some students at a disadvantage.

While these are pandemic related issues, in normal times there would be many other concerns like environmental damage or government bailouts to certain corporates, racial discrimination, lack of sanitation, etc. The task of civil

societies is to act like a watchdog and spark a change for the better. The Corona pandemic is the ideal opportunity to unlock the potential of civic education to make better citizens out of students and a better version of the existing society.

Sujata C is a writer and editor with more than thirty years of experience. She writes on children, environment, society, as well as technology. She has also been a copywriter with advertising agencies for over fifteen years.

Lesson plan: Importance of civic education

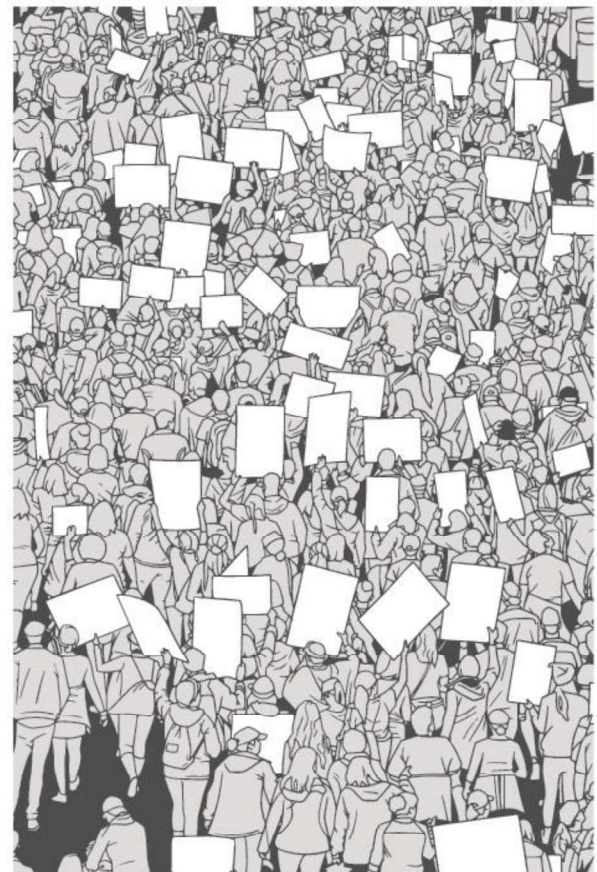
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Choose from a range of activities according to the age of your class. Start small with young children. Begin by sensitising with inspiring stories. Older children are more likely to be self-motivated and can move forward with guidance from teachers. Here are some suggestions for activities that can help imbibe civic awareness among students:

1. Make students find out the names of some of the oldest and prominent civil society organisations in the country and the world.
2. Organise a movie session for inspiration: *Gandhi*, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and other such films.
3. Motivate students to read the local pages of the newspaper that focus on civic issues affecting the normal healthy life of society: hygiene, sanitation, road maintenance, street lighting, crime, pollution, etc.



4. Encourage them to look around their neighbourhood. Are there any local bodies – senior citizens’ club, women’s club, kid’s club, or other special groups? Ask them to identify one problem in their area which they can engage with the authorities to fix .
5. Introduce them to Rosa Parks – the first lady of civil rights movement.
6. Read to them about the Civil Disobedience movement of Indian freedom struggle, and raise the following questions:
 - a. What was the Champaran *satyagraha*?
 - b. What were the issues and how did Gandhi orchestrate the movement?
7. Ask students to prepare an infographic on the Dandi March.
8. Encourage them to read *Civil disobedience – Ron’s Big Mission*, the story of a little



boy who fought discrimination to become a great astronaut. There was a time in the US when only whites could borrow books and bring them home. This is a story from those days.

9. Tell them Martin Luther King's story and make them listen to his famous speech, 'I Have a Dream'.
10. Gather information on the Black Lives Matter issue and help students prepare a note on it.
11. Ask them to visit their weekly vegetable market and check people for maintaining social distancing and wearing of masks.
12. Encourage them to listen to debates and discussions on topics that are different from their personal views, and join a youth leadership programme.
13. Make them aware of the discriminatory practices of the Indian film industry.
14. Start a community garden in your school.
15. Help students volunteer to extend their services at an animal shelter, orphanage or old age home.
16. Motivate them to look out for the elders in the society, like run errands for them for essentials.



17. Encourage them to get together with friends to rally for a cause that is in the news. Sign online petitions that you believe in.
18. Organise a book donation campaign and help them donate these to a village school.
19. Show them how to start a 'Wall of Kindness' in their neighbourhood.

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Curia (proper noun)



Pronunciation: /'kjʊəriə/

Meaning: The papal court at the Vatican, by which the Roman Catholic Church is governed. It comprises various Congregations, Tribunals, and other commissions and departments.

Origin and additional information: The word is presumed to have derived from Old Latin *coviria*, meaning "a gathering of men" (*co-*, "together" = *vir*, "man"). Later, in the mid-19th century, from Latin *curia*, denoting a division of an ancient Roman tribe, also (by extension) the senate of cities other than Rome; later the term came to denote a feudal or Roman Catholic court of justice, whence the current sense. By extension, the word also means not just a gathering, but also the place where an assembly would gather, such as a meeting house.

Word section: A curia is an official body responsible for the governance of a particular Catholic church. The curias may vary in strength and power as per their hierarchical position. Historically they are descended from the Roman *curiae*. In ancient Rome, the citizenry was divided into a number of curias (precisely 30) and each citizen belonged to one such curia.

The term is broadly used to define an assembly or council or even a court where matters of public, official or religious issues were discussed and decided upon.

The word *curia* also came to denote the places of assembly, especially of the senate (a governing and advisory body as according to Roman history). Hence, in medieval times, the king's council was often referred to as a *curia*. The Court of Justice of the European Union uses "CURIA" (in Roman script) in its official emblem. In the United States Supreme Court an interested third party to a case may file a brief as an *amicus curiae* – someone who is not party to the case directly but is willing to assist the court by offering information, expertise, or insight.

Usage:

1. *In 2003, Bishop Sean O'Malley took over, while Lennon stayed on as vicar general and moderator of the **curia**.*
(Source: <https://www.cleveland.com/news/2019/11/cleveland-catholic-diocese-bishop-richard-lennon-celebrated-and-interred-at-cathedral-of-st-john.html>)
2. *It would be conducted under the solemnity of canon law and held before the papal **curia** and Roman nobility.*
(Source: [National Geographic, "In 897, the corpse of a pope was exhumed—to be put on trial.," 20 Aug. 2019](#))
3. *Five years ago, he was appointed one of eight cardinals by Pope Francis to work out how to overhaul the administrative structures of the church, which are known as the Roman **curia**.*
(Source: [A. Odysseus Patrick, Washington Post, "Cardinal George Pell will face trial on sex-offense charges," 1 May 2018](#))