

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · Essay

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

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This is why we keep repeating the same four things:

- Past-year questions show you what UPSC likes to ask, and how it asks.
- Basic sources give you the material.
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HOW MUCH OF EACH ANSWER WAS WITHIN REACH

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We have kept every number conservative, and none goes above 80 percent, because even a familiar question still has to be written well in the exam hall.

For essay topics, the number means how much of the theme and its material was familiar ground. The essay itself is always written fresh in the hall.

QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
A1	Oxymorons and life's ironies	about 75%
A2	A grateful mind	about 75%
A3	A thorn is a changed bud	about 60%
A4	Two elephants and the grass	about 65%
B5	Nature as the spirit's symbol	about 60%
B6	More questions than answers	about 80%
B7	Shelving hard decisions	about 80%
B8	The leader who follows	about 65%

TOPIC A1 · 125 MARKS

Oxymorons reflect the ironies of life.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT An oxymoron joins two opposite words, like 'sweet sorrow'. The topic asks you to show how life itself keeps joining opposites: joy with pain, plenty with hunger, progress with loss.

IN SHORT We practised this style of topic, and UPSC has set it before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *"A smile is the chosen vehicle for all ambiguities."*

HOW IT CONNECTS A smile is one thing that can carry two opposite feelings at once. That is exactly what an oxymoron does with words. The same idea in different clothing.

2018 *"Reality does not conform to the ideal, but confirms it."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Two opposites, the real and the ideal, shown to depend on each other. Writing that essay was practice for this one.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2025 · W7D3 *"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."*

HOW IT CONNECTS This practice topic is itself an oxymoron. Writing it teaches the exact skill this essay needs: hold two opposite truths together and argue both.

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q6 *"India's granaries overflow even as its children grow up too short for their age."*

HOW IT CONNECTS A ready example of life's irony: godowns full, children hungry.

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q5 *"India counts its cities by their skylines, but they are built by those who cannot afford to live in them."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Another: the people who build the city cannot afford to live in it.

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q7 *"India writes new laws faster than it can deliver old verdicts."*

HOW IT CONNECTS And another: new laws arrive faster than old cases get judged.

TOPIC A2 · 125 MARKS

A grateful mind is very beautiful.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT A grateful mind counts what it has, not what it lacks. The topic asks why such a mind is beautiful, meaning calm, content and kind.

IN SHORT UPSC set almost the same topic in 2017.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 “Joy is the simplest form of gratitude.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Joy and gratitude were paired then. Beauty and gratitude are paired now. The virtue is the same.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q3 “Envy measures our lives by a ruler that is not our own.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Envy is the exact opposite of a grateful mind: it measures life with someone else's ruler. Our answer named the cure, contentment. An essay on gratitude is the same essay from the bright side.

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q4 “We forgive others as a favour to ourselves.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same family of topic: a quality inside us that rewards us first.

For balance, our DAW 2026 ethics cases showed gratitude going wrong: repaying a personal debt with a public favour.

TOPIC A3 · 125 MARKS

A thorn is a changed bud.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT A bud is soft. A thorn is sharp. Both grow on the same plant. The topic says what life does to us decides which one we become.

IN SHORT Last year's paper carried the same thought.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2025 *"The best lessons are learnt through bitter experiences."*

HOW IT CONNECTS It said plainly what 2026 says through a plant: hard experiences change us and teach us.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · Essay 2(b) *"Tradition tells us who we are, change tells us who we may yet become."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same ground: what we were, and what we may become.

DAW 2025 · W3D3 *"What you think, you become; but who you are determines what you think."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Also about how a person is shaped and reshaped. The exact thorn line was not set. These two built the same muscle.

TOPIC A4 · 125 MARKS

When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT An old proverb: when the big fight, the small suffer. Today it means big-power rivalry, and the small countries and ordinary people crushed in between.

IN SHORT The arguments were practised in our IR questions. The proverb form was new.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2025 *“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS War and power came as an essay just last year. 2026 asks about power from the side of its victims.

World affairs keep appearing on the essay paper: technology in international relations in 2020, border disputes in 2018.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Tue Q1 *“A foot in every camp can become a leg in none. As the world hardens into blocs, is multi-alignment India's shrewdest strategy or a comfort it can no longer afford?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS India's own answer to fighting elephants: keep a foot in every camp. Anyone who prepared this question had the essay's spine ready.

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q2 *“India presents itself as the voice of the Global South, yet as it grows richer its interests on carbon, trade and debt part ways with the poorest nations.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The grass itself: the poorest countries squeezed between rich blocs on trade, debt and climate.

TOPIC B5 · 125 MARKS

Nature is the symbol of the spirit.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT Nature as something sacred, not just a resource. Rivers as mothers, forests as gods, mountains as temples. The topic asks what this way of seeing gives us, and what we lose when we forget it.

IN SHORT Nature keeps returning on this paper.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 *"We may brave human laws but cannot resist natural laws."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The closest earlier line: nature stands above human will.

2024 *"Forests precede civilizations and deserts follow them."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Civilisation rises from nature and falls when it destroys her. Asked two years ago.

2022 *"Forests are the best-case studies for economic excellence."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Forests again, this time as a teacher.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q7 *"When the harvest depends on the sky, no farmer is truly free."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same relationship from a farmer's side: the sky decides, man adjusts.

The sacred groves and the Bishnois, communities protecting nature as an act of faith, were in our practice answer keys. The spiritual wording itself was not set.

TOPIC B6 · 125 MARKS

A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT Real education does not close questions. It opens them. The more you learn, the more you see how much you do not know.

IN SHORT Our Simulator carried almost the same line.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“The doubter is a true man of science.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The doubter and the questioner are the same person. Doubt in science then, questions in education now.

2023 *“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Also about what education truly is, beyond marks and syllabus.

2021 *“What is research, but a blind date with knowledge!”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Research means walking toward what you do not know. The same idea in playful words.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q1 *“To question well is harder than to answer quickly.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same claim, almost the same sentence. Our answer carried Nachiketa questioning Yama, the Buddha telling followers to test his words, Nalanda's debates, scientific temper, and today's exam culture that rewards ready answers.

DAW 2026 · Essay 1(b) *“The humble mind is the one still able to learn.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The other half of an educated mind: humble enough to keep learning. Our key also carried the balance: at some point, questions must end in a decision.

TOPIC B7 · 125 MARKS

Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT Putting off a hard decision feels safe. The topic says it is the most harmful choice of all, for a person and for a government.

IN SHORT UPSC said the same thing in 2024. Our DAW 2025 model essay carried this topic's core line.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"The cost of being wrong is less than the cost of doing nothing."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same idea in other words: doing nothing costs more than deciding wrongly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2025 · Essay W6D3 *"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our model essay's breakdown said it plainly: decisions must be taken with incomplete information, and action needs courage. That is this topic's whole argument.

DAW 2025 · GS4 W4D1 *"Discuss the ethical consequences of indifference or apathy in human actions, particularly in social situations that demand moral courage."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Staying silent when a situation demands courage is itself a moral failure. Practised as an ethics question.

DAW 2025 · GS4 W6D1 *"How does a culture of 'zero tolerance for mistakes' in a bureaucracy negatively impact an officer's dedication to taking innovative and bold decisions?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The government side: an office that punishes every mistake teaches officers to postpone every decision.

TOPIC B8 · 125 MARKS

A good leader is one who follows the followers.

WHAT THIS TOPIC IS ABOUT We think leaders walk in front. The topic turns it around: a good leader walks behind his people, listens, learns their needs, and serves.

IN SHORT Leadership keeps coming on the essay paper.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *“Character of an institution is reflected in its leader.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Leadership itself as an essay, asked from the top down. 2026 turns it upside down.

2024 *“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but to test the character, give him power.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Power shows a leader's real character. The same ground.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q2 *“A promise is easy to make and hard to be worthy of.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A leader's promise to the people, and the duty to be worthy of it. Half of what following the followers means.

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q3 *“The smallest kindness outlives the largest monument.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our answer carried Ashoka, the emperor who turned from conquest to serving his people. The best Indian example this essay can use. The exact servant-leader line was not set.

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

FREE GUIDANCE

Every free resource is at unlockias.in.

Stuck somewhere, or need direction? Ask on our Telegram channel [UPSCneil](https://t.me/UPSCneil).

MODULE QUERIES

Ping us directly at [@helpdeskupsc](https://t.me/helpdeskupsc) on Telegram, or call or message [+91 91130 79224](tel:+919113079224).

With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies I

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QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
Q1	Ashokan inscriptions as a source	about 70%
Q2	Macaulay's Minute	about 75%
Q3	Gandhian mass movements	about 80%
Q4	Fujiwhara effect and cyclones	about 60%
Q5	Tundra regions	about 70%
Q6	Aeolian processes and desertification	about 75%
Q7	Water in South Asia	about 80%
Q8	Unity in diversity	about 80%
Q9	Disability and inclusive policy	about 70%
Q10	Digital technology and empowerment	about 75%
Q11	Vijayanagara architecture	about 75%
Q12	Linguistic reorganisation	about 80%
Q13	Planned economy and regional balance	about 75%
Q14	Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds	about 65%
Q15	Satellites and farming	about 60%
Q16	Trade shift to the Indo-Pacific	about 75%
Q17	Land-use change	about 80%
Q18	Caste in urban India	about 80%
Q19	Demographic transition	about 80%
Q20	Globalisation and the youth	about 80%

Q1 · 10 MARKS

Analyze the importance of Ashokan inscriptions for reconstructing Mauryan history.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Historians build the past from sources: coins, books, travellers' notes, inscriptions. The question asks what Ashoka's rock and pillar messages tell us about the Mauryan age.

IN SHORT The same type of question keeps coming. Only the source changes.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 "Assess the importance of the accounts of the Chinese and Arab travellers in the reconstruction of the history of India."

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, with travellers' accounts as the source.

2020 "The rock-cut architecture represents one of the most important sources of our knowledge of early Indian art and history. Discuss."

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, with cave architecture as the source.

2013 "Though not very useful from the point of view of a connected political history of South India, the Sangam literature portrays the social and economic conditions of its time with remarkable vividness. Comment."

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, with Sangam poems as the source.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W2 Fri Q2 "Discuss whether such art reflected the society around it or only the tastes of its patrons."

HOW IT CONNECTS The same skill, practised on paintings: read a source as evidence of its time. For the edicts, the content is in your basic books: dhamma, the empire's spread, Kalinga, and one caution, a king writing about himself will praise himself.

Q2 · 10 MARKS

Discuss the impact of Macaulay's Minute on colonial administration and education in India.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Macaulay's Minute of 1835 made English the medium of higher education in India. It was meant to produce clerks for British rule. The question asks what it did to administration and education.

IN SHORT This question was in our banks, one step extended.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"How far was the Industrial Revolution in England responsible for the decline of handicrafts and cottage industries in India?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same kind of question: a colonial policy, and what it did to India. Industry there, education here.

2017 *"Examine how the decline of traditional artisanal industry in colonial India crippled the rural economy."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Again colonial damage, asked for the village economy.

2023 *"What was the difference between Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore in their approach towards education and nationalism?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Gandhi and Tagore were both reacting against the schooling Macaulay built. That debate begins where this question begins.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W2 Thu Q1 *"Western education, meant to serve colonial administration, produced the leaders who challenged it. Discuss this unintended consequence."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question begins exactly at the Minute: English as the medium, clerks as the goal. Same facts. The exam simply stopped the story one step earlier.

Q3 · 10 MARKS

“The significance of the Gandhian movements lay in the masses they mobilized.”
Elucidate.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Gandhi's movements were big because ordinary people joined them: farmers, women, students, workers. The question asks you to show this.

IN SHORT The same debate was in our banks, asked from the other side.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 “Many voices had strengthened and enriched the nationalist movement during the Gandhian phase. Elaborate.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The movement had many voices beyond its leaders. The same point.

2021 “Bring out the constructive programmes of Mahatma Gandhi during Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience Movement.”

HOW IT CONNECTS How ordinary people were actually drawn in: the constructive programmes.

2016 “Discuss the role of women in the freedom struggle, especially during the Gandhian phase.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Women as one large part of that mass base.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W2 Wed Q2 “To what extent was independence won by ordinary people and forces the towering leaders did not control?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked the same thing in reverse: did leaders win freedom, or did ordinary people? Either way the evidence is one list: Champaran, Kheda, Bardoli, Dandi, Quit India after the leaders were jailed.

Simulator GS1 · Set A · Q13 “Discuss the character and spread of the peasant and agrarian movements of the colonial era, with reference to Champaran, the Kisan Sabhas, the Moplah revolt and the Tebhaga movement.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The peasant movements, named case by case. That is the mass base this answer wants.

Simulator GS1 · Set A · Q2 “Bring out the role of literature and song in shaping cultural nationalism during the freedom struggle.”

HOW IT CONNECTS How the message reached people: song, pamphlet, press. Extra marks here.

Q4 · 10 MARKS

What is the Fujiwhara effect? Explain its impact on the movement and intensity of tropical cyclones.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT When two cyclones come close, they start circling each other. That is the Fujiwhara effect. The question asks what it does to a cyclone's path and strength.

IN SHORT The question type is old. The term is new.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"What is sea surface temperature rise? How does it affect the formation of tropical cyclones?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same two-part shape: name a term, link it to cyclones. Only the term changed.

2014 *"Tropical cyclones are largely confined to South China Sea, Bay of Bengal and Gulf of Mexico. Why?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Cyclones keep coming on this paper. This one asked why they form where they do.

2022 *"Discuss the meaning of colour-coded weather warnings for cyclone prone areas given by India Meteorological Department."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Cyclones again, from the warning side.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS1 · Set A · Q5 *"Why is India's east coast struck by deadlier tropical cyclones than its west coast?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Cyclone paths and strength, the second half of this answer, was a full practice question.

DAW 2026 · W3 Thu Q6 *"The Arabian Sea, once far quieter than the Bay of Bengal, has produced a run of severe cyclones."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same physics again. The Fujiwhara term itself was not set anywhere. It is a one-line definition. The rest of the marks come from cyclone basics.

Q5 · 10 MARKS

“Tundra regions are ecologically fragile but economically important.” Examine this statement critically.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The tundra is the cold, treeless land near the poles. Under its frozen ground lie oil, gas and minerals. The question asks how to weigh that wealth against a fragile environment.

IN SHORT The third visit to this theme.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 “What are the economic significances of discovery of oil in Arctic Sea and its possible environmental consequences?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same claim about the Arctic: valuable resources, fragile environment.

2018 “Why is India taking keen interest in resources of Arctic Region?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same resources, from India's side.

2021 “How do the melting of the Arctic ice and glaciers of the Antarctic differently affect the weather patterns and human activities on the Earth? Explain.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The fragile half: what happens when polar regions change.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Fri Q1 “India risks trading dependence on imported oil for dependence on imported minerals. Comment.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Why the world wants what lies under cold ground: oil earlier, minerals now. The tundra's own geography, permafrost and the short growing season, is in your Class XI book.

Q6 · 10 MARKS

Discuss the role of aeolian processes in desertification and land degradation.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Aeolian means wind-made. Wind lifts, carries and dumps soil, and slowly turns dry land into desert. The question asks its role in land degradation.

IN SHORT Both halves have been asked before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *“The process of desertification does not have climatic boundaries. Justify with examples.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Desertification itself, in almost the same words.

2013 *“Major hot deserts in northern hemisphere are located between 20-30 deg N latitudes and on the western side of the continents. Why?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The desert belt where wind does this work.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Thu Q1 *“India loses topsoil far faster than it forms. To what extent is soil degradation a graver long-term threat to food security than any other resource constraint?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Land degradation was our full question: how fast India loses soil, and what that costs food security. The exam only added the wind.

Q7 · 10 MARKS

“Water resources are both an asset and a source of conflict in South Asia.” Examine this statement giving examples.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Rivers cross borders in South Asia. The same water feeds farms and power plants, and starts quarrels between neighbours. The question asks for both sides, with examples.

IN SHORT The examples this answer needs were already questions.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 “Present an account of the Indus Water Treaty and examine its ecological, economic and political implications in the context of changing bilateral relations.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The conflict half, on the same treaty.

2020 “How will the melting of Himalayan glaciers have a far-reaching impact on the water resources of India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The asset half: where the water comes from.

2023 “Why is the world today confronted with a crisis of availability of and access to freshwater resources?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The scarcity that sits behind the conflict.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Wed Q2 “India presses China to share data and consult on its upstream dams on the Brahmaputra, yet as the upper-riparian power on the Teesta and the Ganga it faces the same demand from Bangladesh.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The strongest example there is. On the Brahmaputra, India is the lower country asking China for data. On the Teesta and the Ganga, India is the upper country hearing the same demand from Bangladesh.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q9 “After Operation Sindoor, India has kept the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance, tying its revival to Pakistan ending cross-border terrorism.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Water used as a lever between countries, the current case.

DAW 2026 · W3 Thu Q5 “The river basin, not the state, should be the unit of water planning.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The management half: plan water by river basin, not by state border.

Q8 · 10 MARKS

Unity in diversity remains the defining feature of Indian society despite the challenges from communalism and regionalism. Comment.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT India holds together despite deep differences of religion, language and region. The question asks whether unity in diversity still defines us, despite communal and regional pulls.

IN SHORT All three parts of this question have been asked separately before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 “Describe any four cultural elements of diversity in India and rate their relative significance in building a national identity.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The unity-in-diversity part.

2018 “Communalism arises either due to power struggle or relative deprivation. Argue by giving suitable illustrations.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The communalism part.

2020 “Do you agree that regionalism in India appears to be a consequence of rising cultural assertiveness? Argue.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The regionalism part.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Wed Q4 “Communal conflict in India is less a clash of religious belief than a contest for political and economic power fought in the language of religion.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question carried the line that scores: communal conflict is a fight for power wearing religious clothes.

DAW 2026 · W8 Thu Q1 “Strong regional and linguistic identity in India... is more a healthy feature of federal democracy than a threat to national integration. Critically evaluate.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The regionalism part: healthy pride, or a threat?

Simulator GS1 · Set A · Q9 “Do you think India's linguistic diversity acts more as a binding force for the federation than as a fault line?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The unity part: does our language diversity bind us or split us?

Q9 · 10 MARKS

How do you understand disability? Substantiate the need for inclusive policy framework in India in this regard.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Disability can be seen two ways: as a problem in a person's body, or as barriers society builds, stairs without ramps, forms without braille. The question asks how you understand it, and why policy must include everyone.

IN SHORT This question was in our banks, in GS2.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“Despite comprehensive policies for equity and social justice, underprivileged sections are not yet getting the full benefits of affirmative action envisaged by the Constitution. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The closest earlier ask: rights on paper, benefits not reaching people.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q18 *“Nearly a decade after the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 replaced welfare with a rights-based mandate, its entitlements have not delivered real inclusion of Divyangjan. Examine why.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question was the second half of this answer, complete: the 2016 law, charity replaced by rights, and why real inclusion still lags. Set in GS2, asked in GS1.

The first half needs the one idea above: the barrier is in society, not in the body. The policy case follows from that shift.

Q10 · 10 MARKS

Do you think digital technology promotes social empowerment? Explain with examples.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Digital technology promises power to ordinary people: money, information, markets. The question asks whether it truly empowers, with examples.

IN SHORT The doubting side, where the marks are, was practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2021 “Examine the role of ‘Gig Economy’ in the process of empowerment of women in India.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same doubt, asked of the gig economy.

2020 “How have digital initiatives in India contributed to the functioning of the education system in the country? Elaborate your answer.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, in education.

2022 “Elucidate the relationship between globalization and new technology in a world of scarce resources, with special reference to India.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Technology and society, the wider version.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · W4 Sat Q2 “A pensioner is turned away from her monthly pension because her fingerprints, worn by age and labour, no longer authenticate on the system that paid her for years.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The counter-example this answer needs: the system built to pay a pensioner turns her away when her worn fingerprints fail.

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q8 “In the village the smartphone arrives long before the skill to read it.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Access without ability, in one line. The bright side, UPI, DBT, telemedicine, everyone knows.

Q11 · 15 MARKS

Vijayanagara architecture exemplifies the amalgamation of past traditions with contemporary practices. Elucidate with examples.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Vijayanagara, today's Hampi, mixed older South Indian temple styles with newer practices, even arches and domes. The question asks you to show this mixing, with examples.

IN SHORT A dynasty's architecture comes almost every year. We practised the two ideas this one joins.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 *“Krishnadeva Raya, the King of Vijayanagar, was not only an accomplished scholar himself but was also a great patron of learning and literature. Discuss.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Vijayanagara itself, asked before.

2024 *“Though the great Cholas are no more, yet their name is still remembered with great pride because of their highest achievements in the domain of art and architecture. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A dynasty's art, almost every year. The Pallavas also came in 2024, the Chandellas in 2025.

2014 *“Gandhara sculpture owed as much to the Romans as to the Greeks. Explain.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Two styles mixing, which is this question's exact idea, asked through Gandhara.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q12 *“The Vesara temple style of the Chalukyas and Hoysalas is a distinct architectural idiom, not merely a blend of the northern Nagara and southern Dravida styles. Elucidate.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Deccan temple style Vijayanagara grew from. Same marks, same directive.

Simulator GS1 · Set A · Q12 *“Bring out the salient features of Indo-Islamic architecture, in which indigenous post-and-lintel (trabeate) craft was fused with the imported arch-and-dome (arcuate) idiom.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The mixing idea itself: Indian beam-and-pillar craft meeting the imported arch and dome. The Lotus Mahal at Hampi is that mix in stone.

Q12 · 15 MARKS

Linguistic reorganization of Indian States was driven by popular pressure from below. Comment.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT In the 1950s, people's movements forced India's map to be redrawn by language. The question asks whether the push truly came from below.

IN SHORT We named this topic as due before the exam, and set it.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 *"Has the formation of linguistic states strengthened the cause of Indian unity?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Linguistic states, asked directly.

2022 *"The political and administrative reorganization of states and territories has been a continuous ongoing process since the mid-nineteenth century. Discuss with examples."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Reorganisation as a continuing story.

2018 *"Discuss whether formation of new states in recent times is beneficial or not for the economy of India."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The newer statehood demands, which grew from the same 1956 template.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS1 · Set A · Q11 *"Trace how the linguistic reorganisation of states settled one set of disputes yet set the template for later demands for statehood."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our June prediction file marked this topic as due: the States Reorganisation Act turns seventy on 1 November 2026. We set it as a 15-marker. UPSC asked it at 15.

DAW 2025 · W7D5 *"The linguistic reorganization of states, as recommended by the States Reorganisation Commission (1953), was a major step in nation-building. Analyze its role in strengthening Indian federalism."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same topic, practised a year earlier. The point most answers miss: the pressure was from below, Potti Sriramulu's fast and the Andhra movement, while Nehru and the JVP Committee resisted before they agreed.

Q13 · 15 MARKS

The model of planned economy was adopted in India to address the regional imbalances left behind by colonial rule. Comment.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT After 1947 India chose planned development: five-year plans, public factories, state direction. The question asks whether this was meant to fix the regional imbalance the British left, and whether it did.

IN SHORT Both halves were in our practice.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2025 *“Trace India's consolidation process during early phase of independence in terms of polity, economy, education and international relations.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Early planning sits inside last year's question.

2024 *“What is regional disparity? How does it differ from diversity? How serious is the issue of regional disparity in India.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Regional imbalance itself, asked directly.

2017 *“Examine how the decline of traditional artisanal industry in colonial India crippled the rural economy.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The colonial damage that planning set out to repair.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W2 Tue Q2 *“To what extent did the Russian Revolution shape India's freedom struggle and early economic thinking?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Where the planning idea came from: the Soviet example, the Planning Committee, the Bombay Plan. The first half of this answer.

DAW 2026 · W3 Sat Q3 *“Dhanbad sits on coal, Keonjhar on iron ore, Bastar on bauxite, yet all three rank among India's poorest districts.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Did balance come? Mineral-rich districts staying poor says not everywhere. The counterpoint: freight equalisation drained the mineral east.

Q14 · 15 MARKS

Compare the Loo, Chinook and Foehn winds with respect to their regions of prevalence, their nature and climatic impacts.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Three local winds: the hot Loo of North India, the warm Chinook of North America, the warm Foehn of the Alps. The question asks where they blow, what they are, and what they do.

IN SHORT Said honestly: these three winds were not set anywhere. They are the Class XI local winds list.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2023 “Why is the South-West Monsoon called 'Purvaiya' (easterly) in Bhojpur Region? How has this directional seasonal wind system influenced the cultural ethos of the region?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The only earlier local-wind question: a named wind, its region, its effect on life.

2017 “What characteristics can be assigned to monsoon climate that succeeds in feeding more than 50 percent of the world population residing in Monsoon Asia?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Winds and the people under them.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Thu Q3 “Western disturbances are shifting the sowing windows for North India's winter wheat.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question shape: a named wind system and its effect on a region. Practice gave the shape. The book gives these three winds.

Three things to compare: write a table, not paragraphs.

Q15 · 15 MARKS

Analyze the role of satellite-based technologies in achieving climate-smart agriculture and food security in India.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Satellites watch farms from above: soil, moisture, crop health. The question asks their role in climate-smart farming and food security.

IN SHORT The same slot appeared last year.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2025 *“How can Artificial Intelligence (AI) and drones be effectively used along with GIS and RS techniques in locational and areal planning?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same slot, one year ago, with planning instead of farming.

2018 *“Why is Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System (IRNSS) needed? How does it help in navigation?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Satellites, asked directly.

2024 *“The groundwater potential of the gangetic valley is on a serious decline. How may it affect the food security of India?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Food security, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Thu Q3 *“To what extent can better forecasting, rather than a change in the cropping calendar, protect the rabi harvest?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The argument this answer runs on: better information protects harvests. The satellite names, Bhuvan and RISAT, sit on top of that base.

Q16 · 15 MARKS

“The centre of global trade is gradually shifting from the Atlantic region to the Indo-Pacific region.” Examine this statement.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT World trade once centred on the Atlantic, between Europe and America. It is shifting to the Indo-Pacific, the seas from India to the Pacific. The question asks you to examine this shift.

IN SHORT We practised this under international relations. UPSC asked it as geography.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2014 “Account for the change in the spatial pattern of the iron and steel industry in the world.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same kind of question: something moved across the world map, explain why. Steel then, trade itself now.

2022 “Mention the significance of straits and isthmus in international trade.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The sea passages trade runs through.

2016 “South China Sea has assumed great geopolitical significance in the present context. Comment.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The Indo-Pacific's most contested water.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q19 “Narrow sea routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb carry much of India's energy and trade, making the security of sea lines of communication central to its Indo-Pacific strategy.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The sea-route half: the narrow straits India's energy and trade pass through.

DAW 2026 · W7 Tue Q2 “The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor must cross a region in conflict and raise vast financing before it can move a single container.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The new corridors the shift is creating. Same content, both papers.

Q17 · 15 MARKS

Analyze the major drivers of human-induced land-use changes in India and their geographical consequences.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Farms turning into factories, lakes into colonies, forests into plantations. The question asks what drives these changes of land use, and what they do to geography.

IN SHORT The drivers and the consequences were each practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2021 *“What are the environmental implications of the reclamation of water bodies into urban land use? Explain with examples.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS One driver in close-up: cities swallowing water bodies.

2015 *“How far do you agree that the behaviour of the Indian monsoon has been changing due to humanizing landscapes? Discuss.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS One consequence: changed land changing the monsoon itself.

2020 *“The process of desertification does not have climatic boundaries. Justify with examples.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Another consequence: land turning to desert.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Sat Q1 *“On a city's edge, a single stretch of land is claimed at once by farms, a factory, a housing colony and the forest department.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS All four drivers in one practice question: farm, factory, housing and forest fighting for one stretch of land.

DAW 2026 · W3 Wed Q4 *“India counts a monoculture plantation and an old-growth forest in the same tree-cover figure, even as natural forest shrinks.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A consequence hidden in a statistic: plantations counted as forest while real forest shrinks.

DAW 2026 · W3 Mon Q1 *“Joshimath cracks under construction load, Mumbai's reclaimed wards settle, Kolkata's deltaic foundations soften.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A consequence underfoot: cities sinking where land was used against its nature. Any two of these complete the answer.

Q18 · 15 MARKS

Is caste disappearing in urban India? Illustrate your answer with examples.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT In cities, caste seems to fade: no one asks it at the office. But it survives in marriage and trust. The question asks whether caste is truly disappearing.

IN SHORT UPSC asked this in 2020. Our practice question was its answer.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *“Has caste lost its relevance in understanding the multi-cultural Indian society? Elaborate your answer with illustrations.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, six years earlier.

2018 *“Caste system is assuming new identities and associational forms. Hence, caste system cannot be eradicated in India. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The answer's core line, caste changes form but survives, was itself the question.

2023 *“Why is caste identity in India both fluid and static?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same puzzle, put as a riddle.

2024 *“Intercaste marriages between castes which have socio-economic parity have increased, to some extent, but this is less true of interreligious marriages. Discuss.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Marriage as the test of whether caste is fading.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q1 *“A metropolitan, dual-income professional family has given up its caste occupation and public ritual, yet still screens for caste in arranging marriages and choosing whom to trust. In urban India, education and prosperity change the form of caste more than they end it.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is the exam's answer stated as a claim: ritual and occupation gone, marriage and trust still screened by caste. The examples are inside it. For balance: city anonymity, inter-dining, mixed workplaces.

Q19 · 15 MARKS

Critically examine the challenges of demographic transition in contemporary India.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Demographic transition is the shift from many births and deaths to few. India is midway: a young north, an ageing south. The question asks for its challenges.

IN SHORT Three challenges, three practice questions.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 “What is the concept of a 'demographic winter'? Is the world moving towards such a situation? Elaborate.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The late stage of the same transition: the world running out of children.

2015 “Critically examine whether growing population is the cause of poverty or poverty is the main cause of population increase in India.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The early stage: population and poverty feeding each other.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Tue Q2 “India's demographic dividend yields growth only when matched by jobs and skills, and its window is already closing in the ageing south even as it stays open in the north.”

HOW IT CONNECTS First challenge: jobs and skills before the window closes.

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q8 “What does it mean for a country to 'grow old before it grows rich'?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Second challenge: growing old before growing rich.

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q19 “Do population-based formulas for delimitation and fiscal devolution penalise southern states for their success in controlling population?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Third challenge: the states that controlled population first now fear losing seats and money for it. The point most answers never reach.

Q20 · 15 MARKS

Evaluate the impact of globalization on Indian youths with reference to social, political, economic and cultural spheres.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Globalisation opened India to the world's goods, jobs, screens and dreams. The question asks what it has done to the young, across four sides of life.

IN SHORT UPSC's most repeated society question. The group changes, the frame stays.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"Globalization has increased urban migration by skilled, young, unmarried women from various classes. How has this trend impacted upon their personal freedom and relationship with family?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Globalisation and the young, asked two years ago.

2013 *"Critically examine the effect of globalization on the aged population in India."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, about the old.

2015 *"Discuss the positive and negative effects of globalization on women in India."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, about women.

2025 *"Do you think that globalization results in only an aggressive consumer culture? Justify your answer."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The culture side, last year.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Tue Q3 *"Advertising and social media place the lifestyles of the rich and of the West before India's young every day, lifting their wants well beyond their means."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The youth version was itself our question: wants raised beyond means, and what follows, debt, pressure, migration.

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q1 *"Three decades of opening to global trade and capital have produced an India deeply connected to the world economy beside one largely shut out of its gains."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The economic side: connected India beside excluded India. The social and cultural sides come from the same material.

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

FREE GUIDANCE

Every free resource is at unlockias.in.

Stuck somewhere, or need direction? Ask on our Telegram channel [UPSCneil](https://t.me/UPSCneil).

MODULE QUERIES

Ping us directly at [@helpdeskupsc](https://t.me/helpdeskupsc) on Telegram, or call or message [+91 91130 79224](tel:+919113079224).

With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies II

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

We are not saying that every question could be completely answered from old UPSC papers or from DAW and the Sherlocking Simulators. That is not possible, and we will not pretend it is.

What we are showing is this: most of this paper came from familiar ground. A student who had gone through past-year questions, read the basic books, and practised answer writing had already met most of what this paper asks, only in different words.

This is why we keep repeating the same four things:

- Past-year questions show you what UPSC likes to ask, and how it asks.
- Basic sources give you the material.
- Answer-writing practice, DAW and the Simulators, trains you to brainstorm and structure an answer within time.
- The last piece is mindset. Go in expecting new words on familiar ground. Do not let a new-looking question shake you.

Where a link is only partial, we have said so on that page. Where a topic was simply new, we have said that too. No link here has been stretched.

Every quoted question is word for word from the actual papers and booklets. Compiled on 23 August 2026.

HOW MUCH OF EACH ANSWER WAS WITHIN REACH

These numbers are rough estimates, not measurements. For each question we asked one thing: a student who studied past-year questions, read the basic sources, and practised with DAW and the Simulators, how much of a full answer could that student build? The rest is execution: turning what you know into a written answer, within time, in the exam hall. That too is a skill, and practice builds it.

We have kept every number conservative, and none goes above 80 percent, because even a familiar question still has to be written well in the exam hall.

QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
Q1	Privacy and the transgender law	about 70%
Q2	Women's reservation	about 80%
Q3	The Speaker and anti-defection	about 80%
Q4	Right to vote and voter rolls	about 80%
Q5	NCSC and NCST powers	about 75%
Q6	Tribal development policy	about 75%
Q7	Malnutrition beyond health	about 80%
Q8	Generalist civil services	about 75%
Q9	IPMDA, SAGAR and the Quad	about 65%
Q10	BRICS and the Global South	about 75%
Q11	The Governor and assent	about 80%
Q12	Judicial legislation and the living will	about 75%
Q13	Asymmetric federalism	about 80%
Q14	India and the US model	about 75%
Q15	Pressure groups and corporate power	about 75%
Q16	Transparency and trust	about 80%
Q17	Rights-based welfare	about 80%
Q18	Education: welfare or investment	about 80%
Q19	The diaspora as a living bridge	about 75%
Q20	China's BRI in South Asia	about 75%

Q1 · 10 MARKS

Right to privacy relating to self-identity is very dear to every human being and well protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. In this context, examine the effect of the amendment in 2026, to the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Article 21 protects life and liberty, and courts have read privacy into it. Self-identity means the right to say who you are, including your gender. The question asks how the 2026 amendment to the transgender law affects this right.

IN SHORT The privacy question returns. Our practice covered its base.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“Right to privacy is intrinsic to life and personal liberty and is inherently protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. Explain. In this reference, discuss the law relating to DNA testing of a child in the womb to establish its paternity.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The 2026 question opens with nearly the same sentence. DNA testing then, gender identity now.

2017 *“Examine the scope of Fundamental Rights in the light of the latest judgement of the Supreme Court on Right to Privacy.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The privacy judgment on which the whole answer stands.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q14 *“Judicial interpretation has made Article 21 an open-ended reservoir of new socio-economic and digital rights. Elaborate, with its limits.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Identity as a new right read into Article 21, the NALSA to Puttaswamy chain, was our full question.

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q12 *“The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, now in force, tilt the balance towards the State's access to data and away from the citizen's right to privacy and to information.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Privacy against the State, practised on data protection. Test the amendment on one point: does it respect a person's right to declare their own identity?

Q2 · 10 MARKS

“Women as a class neither belong to a minority group nor are they regarded as forming a backward class.” In the light of this statement, discuss the evolution of women's reservation from local bodies to Parliament.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Women got one-third of panchayat seats in 1993. The 106th Amendment of 2023 promises the same in the Lok Sabha. The question asks you to trace this journey.

IN SHORT The whole journey was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“The reservation of seats for women in the institutions of local self-government has had a limited impact on the patriarchal character of the Indian Political Process. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The middle of the story: what panchayat reservation changed, and what it did not.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Wed Q1 *“The one-third reservation of seats for women in panchayats reshaped local politics yet entrenched proxy rule through the 'sarpanch-pati.' Reserving seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies will reproduce this proxy representation rather than transcend it. How far do you agree?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question held the whole arc: panchayat reservation, the sarpanch-pati problem, and whether Parliament's version will repeat it.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q1 *“Women's reservation in legislatures is tied to the first delimitation after the next Census. Discuss how this linkage shapes its timing, and the federal concerns a population-based delimitation raises.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Parliament end: why the new law waits for a census and delimitation.

Q3 · 10 MARKS

Examine whether the constitutional office of the Lok Sabha Speaker has become vulnerable to partisan politics under the current anti-defection regime. What institutional changes are required to ensure the neutrality of the Lok Sabha Speaker in managing a polarised House?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Speaker decides defection cases, but belongs to a party. The question asks whether this makes the office partisan, and what would fix it.

IN SHORT Both halves were in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *“Once a Speaker, Always a Speaker!” Do you think this practice should be adopted to impart objectivity to the office of the Speaker of Lok Sabha?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The fix itself was the question: should a Speaker leave party politics for good.

2013 *“The role of individual MPs (Members of Parliament) has diminished over the years... How far can this be attributed to the anti-defection law...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The anti-defection law's cost, asked long ago.

2023 *“Discuss the role of Presiding Officers of state legislatures in maintaining order and impartiality in conducting legislative work.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Impartiality of presiding officers, asked recently.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q5 *“Explain why Speaker-led adjudication of Tenth Schedule disqualifications breeds partisan delay, and why an independent tribunal is proposed instead.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Both halves of the exam question in one practice stem: why the Speaker's defection power invites bias, and the independent tribunal as the cure.

DAW 2026 · W1 Fri Q4 *“A bill is certified a Money Bill by the Speaker, leaving the Rajya Sabha only to recommend, and the certification is contested. When the Speaker's word is final, how far is bicameralism left intact?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The second place the office bends: a Money Bill certificate no one can appeal.

Q4 · 10 MARKS

Is the right to vote a fundamental right? Discuss the position of the Election Commission of India while undertaking the revision of electoral rolls. Can it also examine the question of citizenship of voters?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Voting is a right given by law, not a fundamental right, though the Constitution promises adult suffrage. The question asks about this, and whether the Election Commission can check citizenship while cleaning voter rolls.

IN SHORT The exact controversy was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“On what grounds can a people's representative be disqualified under the Representation of the People Act, 1951?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The legal frame: elections run under the Representation of the People Act.

2018 *“In light of the recent controversy regarding the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), what are the challenges before the Election Commission of India to ensure the trustworthiness of elections in India?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Commission's credibility questioned, then over EVMs.

2022 *“Discuss the role of the Election Commission of India in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Commission's powers, through the Model Code.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q3 *“The Supreme Court has upheld the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, including its power to examine citizenship. Discuss the basis of this power...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question named the same roll revision, citizenship check included. The tension to argue: cleaner rolls against the risk of striking off real voters.

Q5 · 10 MARKS

Do constitutional bodies like the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) possess adequate enforcement powers to secure substantive social equality? Suggest measures to enhance their institutional effectiveness.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The NCSC and NCST are constitutional bodies meant to protect SCs and STs. They can inquire like courts, but mostly they can only recommend. The question asks whether their powers are enough.

IN SHORT The same design question, with different commissions, was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 “Whether the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) can enforce the implementation of constitutional reservation for the Scheduled Castes in religious minority institutions? Examine.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same commission, the same doubt about its teeth.

2018 “Multiplicity of various commissions for the vulnerable sections of society leads to problems of overlapping jurisdiction and duplication of functions. Is it better to merge all commissions into an umbrella Human Rights Commission?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Too many commissions, too little power.

2020 “Which steps are required for the constitutionalization of a Commission? Do you think imparting constitutionality to the National Commission for Women would ensure greater gender justice and empowerment in India? Give reasons.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Does constitutional status change anything?

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q15 “The NHRC, the NCBC and the National Commission for Women differ in their constitutional or statutory standing, the independence of their composition, and whether their orders bind or only recommend.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked it of three other commissions. The hinge is the same: they recommend, they rarely bind. The fixes transfer: time-bound replies, reports before Parliament, real powers to act.

Q6 · 10 MARKS

Does India's tribal development policy reflect the aspirations for a socially grounded and equity-based governance? Justify your answer.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Tribal development policy promises land rights, self-rule and protection from displacement. The question asks whether the promise is kept on the ground.

IN SHORT Three tests of this policy were practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2025 *“Does tribal development in India centre around two axes, those of displacement and of rehabilitation? Give your opinion.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same policy, questioned in GS1 last year.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q17 *“Do you think tribal displacement in India persists mainly because the design of forest and land entitlements is outrun by resource extraction and weak rehabilitation?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The displacement test: entitlements losing to extraction.

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q14 *“In the devolution of powers to local bodies, the transfer of functions has run ahead of the transfer of finances. Explain the reasons for this gap... with reference to Fifth Schedule areas and the PESA Act”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The self-rule test: PESA strong on paper, thin on the ground.

DAW 2026 · W3 Wed Q1 *“A tiger reserve seeks to relocate a village whose residents hold Forest Rights Act titles.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The consent test: relocation against Forest Rights Act titles. One pattern across all three: good law, weak delivery.

Q7 · 10 MARKS

Malnutrition in India is not merely a public health concern; it is also a challenge of social equity, human development and effective welfare governance. Discuss.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Malnutrition is not just about health. It decides who grows, who learns, who earns. The question asks you to see it as a problem of fairness, human development and governance.

IN SHORT The same reframe was itself asked in 2018.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“How far do you agree with the view that the focus on lack of availability of food as the main cause of hunger takes the attention away from ineffective human development policies in India?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Hunger as a policy failure, not a food shortage. The exam's exact angle.

2024 *“Poverty and malnutrition create a vicious cycle, adversely affecting human capital formation. What steps can be taken to break the cycle?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Malnutrition eating into human capital.

2019 *“There is a growing divergence in the relationship between poverty and hunger in India. The shrinking of social expenditure by the government is forcing the poor to spend more on non-food essential items, squeezing their food budget. Elucidate.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Poverty falling while hunger stays.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q3 *“India's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) has fallen sharply over the past decade, yet child undernutrition has barely improved and India's Global Hunger Index ranking remains poor.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The fairness side: averages improve, children stay stunted.

Simulator Essay · Set B · Q6 *“India's granaries overflow even as its children grow up too short for their age.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The whole claim in one line. The governance side: why POSHAN and ICDS deliver less than promised.

Q8 · 10 MARKS

Analyse the advantages and limitations of the generalist structure of the Indian Civil Services in contemporary governance.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT IAS officers are generalists: they move between departments rather than mastering one field. The question asks what this gives us and what it costs.

IN SHORT The advantages, the limits and the fixes were each practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2014 *“Has the Cadre based Civil Services Organization been the cause of slow change in India? Critically examine.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The limit itself asked: has the cadre system slowed change?

2017 *“Initially, Civil Services in India were designed to achieve the goals of neutrality and effectiveness, which seems to be lacking in the present context. Do you agree with the view that drastic reforms are required in Civil Services? Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The reform question, asked directly.

2020 *“Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance.’ In this context, suggest reforms in Civil Service for strengthening democracy.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Reform again, for the economy's sake.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q8 *“Discuss reforms to make the higher civil services both politically neutral and responsive, and how capacity-building can reconcile the two.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The measures half was our full question.

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q4 *“Sardar Patel defended a permanent civil service for its insulation from political change, yet every civil servant must loyally carry out the distinct agenda of each elected government in turn.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The advantage half: Patel's case for a permanent service.

DAW 2025 · W6D1 *“How does a culture of 'zero tolerance for mistakes' in a bureaucracy negatively impact an officer's dedication to taking innovative and bold decisions?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The limit half: punish every mistake and officers stop deciding. Fixes to name: Mission Karmayogi, lateral entry, longer tenures.

Q9 · 10 MARKS

“IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness) bridges the gap between India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision and the Quad's collective Indo-Pacific strategy.” Make a critical assessment of the statement focusing on IPMDA.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT IPMDA shares sea-watching data among Indo-Pacific countries. SAGAR is India's own vision of a safe neighbourhood at sea. The question asks whether IPMDA joins the two.

IN SHORT The maritime groupings question comes almost every year.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)’ is transforming itself into a trade bloc from a military alliance in present times...”

HOW IT CONNECTS The Quad, asked directly.

2021 “The newly tri-nation partnership AUKUS is aimed at countering China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Is it going to supersede the existing partnerships in the region?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The groupings question, again.

2013 “What do you understand by 'The String of Pearls'? How does it impact India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Why India watches the sea: the original threat picture.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q1 “Groupings like the Quad and the India-Israel-United States-United Arab Emirates (I2U2) bloc issue joint declarations for years without treaties or secretariats. Comment on what they have actually delivered...”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked the exact test: what have these groupings actually delivered? IPMDA is the Quad's clearest delivery: shared eyes on the sea.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q19 “Narrow sea routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab-el-Mandeb carry much of India's energy and trade, making the security of sea lines of communication central to its Indo-Pacific strategy.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The SAGAR half: why sea lanes are central to India's security.

Q10 · 10 MARKS

“BRICS acts as a powerful counterweight in global governance, actively amplifying the voice and influence of the Global South.” Explain the role of BRICS in projecting itself as an alternative to other groupings.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT BRICS groups Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa and newer members. The question asks whether it truly balances Western-led institutions and speaks for the Global South.

IN SHORT We set the BRICS question in June, for this very year.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *“The World Bank and the IMF, collectively known as the Bretton Woods Institutions, are the two inter-governmental pillars supporting the structure of the world's economic and financial order.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The institutions BRICS stands against were asked directly. The New Development Bank is the counter to name.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q19 *“India's chairmanship of BRICS in 2026 offers it an opportunity to consolidate its leadership of the Global South. In view of the cohesion challenges of the expanded grouping, critically evaluate this claim.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question named India's 2026 chairmanship, with both sides ready: the platform, and the strain inside a bigger club.

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q2 *“India presents itself as the voice of the Global South, yet as it grows richer its interests on carbon, trade and debt part ways with the poorest nations.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Global South claim, with its own counter: can a richer India still speak for the poorest?

Q11 · 15 MARKS

Discuss the position of the Governor in the federal polity of India. What is the nature of his power while giving assent to a bill passed by the State Legislature? Is he bound by the aid and advice of his Council of Ministers in all his functions?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Governor can sign a State bill, hold it back, or send it to the President. The question asks the nature of this power, and whether he is always bound by the elected government's advice.

IN SHORT The assent question, in its current form, was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *“Discuss the essential conditions for exercise of the legislative powers by the Governor. Discuss the legality of re-promulgation of ordinances by the Governor without placing them before the Legislature.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Governor's law-making role, asked directly.

2018 *“Whether the Supreme Court Judgement (July 2018) can settle the political tussle between the Lt. Governor and the elected government of Delhi? Examine.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS An appointed head against an elected government, the Delhi version.

2016 *“Discuss the essentials of the 69th Constitutional Amendment Act and anomalies, if any, that have led to recent reported conflicts between the elected representatives and the institution of the Lieutenant Governor...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same friction, earlier.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q1 *“On a Bill under Article 200, the Governor may assent, withhold assent, or reserve it for the President. Examine the limits of this discretion and whether courts can remedy prolonged inaction.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question named the same battle: the options under Article 200, and whether courts can push a Governor who sits on a bill.

DAW 2026 · W1 Fri Q2 *“The President normally acts on the advice of the Council of Ministers, yet a hung mandate or a contested bill can reopen genuine choice.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Aid and advice, practised one office up: bound as a rule, free at the named edges. The same answer fits the Governor.

Q12 · 15 MARKS

What is meant by judicial legislation? In this context, discuss the verdicts of the apex court allowing “passive euthanasia” and a “living will”.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT When courts lay down rules where no law exists, it is called judicial legislation. The court allowed passive euthanasia, letting a dying patient go, and the living will, writing your wishes in advance. The question asks about both.

IN SHORT The term itself was a question in 2020.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Judicial Legislation is antithetical to the doctrine of separation of powers as envisaged in the Indian Constitution.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The exact words, asked before.

2024 “Explain the reasons for the growth of public interest litigation in India. As a result of it, has the Indian Supreme Court emerged as the world's most powerful judiciary?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Courts making law through public interest cases.

2014 “Starting from inventing the 'basic structure' doctrine, the judiciary has played a highly proactive role in ensuring that India develops into a thriving democracy.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The long arc of judicial activism.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W1 Tue Q2 “When Parliament lays down only the principle and a ministry writes the rules, who is really making the law?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same doctrine, practised on the executive: who should make law, and where the line sits.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q14 “Judicial interpretation has made Article 21 an open-ended reservoir of new socio-economic and digital rights.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The euthanasia half: dignity read into Article 21. The case to cite: Common Cause, 2018.

Q13 · 15 MARKS

How far has the Indian federal framework been successful in accommodating regional and cultural diversities? Highlight the role of asymmetric federalism and suggest measures to make dispute resolution mechanisms more effective.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT India gives some regions special arrangements: Union Territories, Article 371 provisions, tribal schedules. That is asymmetric federalism, unequal on purpose. The question asks how well it accommodates diversity, and how disputes can be settled better.

IN SHORT The exact phrase was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2014 *“Though the federal principle is dominant in our Constitution and that principle is one of its basic features, it is equally true that federalism under the Indian Constitution leans in favour of a strong Centre...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The frame: our federalism tilts toward the Centre.

2015 *“The concept of cooperative federalism has been increasingly emphasized in recent years. Highlight the drawbacks in the existing structure and the extent to which cooperative federalism would answer the shortcomings.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The machinery and its gaps.

2023 *“Explain the significance of the 101st Constitutional Amendment Act. To what extent does it reflect the accommodative spirit of federalism?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Accommodation, in the same word.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q4 *“Compare and contrast a Union Territory having a legislature with a full-fledged State, and locate this within India's asymmetric federalism.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question used the exact phrase, asymmetric federalism, through Union Territories.

DAW 2026 · W1 Thu Q2 *“Article 371 provisions were meant to be temporary, yet endure. What does their persistence reveal about Indian federalism?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The evidence: special provisions that never expired.

Simulator GS2 · Set B · Q13 *“The cooperative-federalism machinery, namely the Inter-State Council, the Zonal Councils and the NITI Aayog Governing Council, remains largely advisory.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The dispute half: the councils exist but only advise. The fix: give them teeth and a calendar.

Q14 · 15 MARKS

Examine how the separation of powers is practised in India compared to the rigid presidential model of the United States of America. In this context, compare the actual authority of the Indian Prime Minister with that of the President of the USA.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT America separates its President from its Congress strictly. India fuses them: the Prime Minister sits inside Parliament. The question asks you to compare the two, and the real power of the PM against the US President.

IN SHORT The doctrine was asked in 2019. The American side is textbook.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“Do you think that the Constitution of India does not accept the principle of strict separation of powers; rather, it is based on the principle of 'checks and balances'? Explain.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked straight: India runs on checks and balances, not sealed compartments.

2014 *“The size of the cabinet should be as big as governmental work justifies and as big as the Prime Minister can manage as a team.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The Prime Minister's real span of control.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W1 Wed Q2 *“In the light of coalition allies and even ministers now dissenting in public without resigning, how far does the unwritten convention of collective responsibility still bind the Council of Ministers?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS How our executive actually works, which the comparison turns on. The line that scores: the PM is stronger at home than a US President, yet lives or dies by the House's numbers.

Q15 · 15 MARKS

To what extent do pressure groups, social movements and corporate lobbies deepen pluralistic democracy in India by representing excluded interests? Analyse whether the growing convergence of corporate wealth and political power poses a threat to the autonomy of formal democratic institutions.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Pressure groups, movements and corporate lobbies all push governments from outside. The question asks whether they deepen democracy by speaking for the excluded, or whether money and power together threaten it.

IN SHORT Pressure groups come almost every year. The corporate half was asked in 2021.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *"Pressure group politics is sometimes seen as the informal face of politics. With regards to the above, assess the structure and functioning of pressure groups in India."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Pressure groups, asked directly.

2021 *"Pressure Groups play a vital role in influencing public policy making in India.' Explain how business associations contribute to public policies."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The corporate half, asked through business associations.

2025 *"What are environmental pressure groups? Discuss their role in raising awareness, influencing policies and advocating for environmental protection in India."*

HOW IT CONNECTS And again last year, through environmental groups.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q3 *"Tighter foreign-funding rules and the labelling of advocacy groups as anti-development have curbed the watchdog role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)... suggest measures to regulate NGOs without disabling their watchdog role."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The democracy-deepening half: civil society speaking for the excluded, and how to regulate without silencing.

DAW 2026 · W1 Fri Q1 *"Trade-union decline in India is better explained by liberalisation than by the unions' own politicisation."*

HOW IT CONNECTS One pressure group traced across time. The corporate half of the answer: election funding, lobbying without a law, captured regulators.

Q16 · 15 MARKS

“Transparency and accountability in governance are not about controlling corruption but about creating the trust of stakeholders in the policy process by following the Rule of Law and Participatory Governance.” Comment.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The statement says transparency is not about catching thieves. It is about earning people's trust through fair rules and participation. The question asks you to comment.

IN SHORT The trust idea was practised in three questions.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“The Citizen's Charter is an ideal instrument of organisational transparency and accountability, but it has its own limitations. Identify the limitations and suggest measures for greater effectiveness of the Citizen's Charters.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A transparency tool and its limits.

2013 *“Though Citizens' charters have been formulated by many public service delivery organizations, there is no corresponding improvement in the level of citizens' satisfaction and quality of services being provided. Analyse.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The exam's exact problem: the process exists, trust does not follow.

2018 *“e-Governance is not only about utilization of the power of new technology, but also about the critical importance of the 'use value' of information. Explain.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Information matters only if citizens can use it.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W1 Wed Q3 *“At a jan sunwai under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), villagers reading the muster roll expose works paid for but never built. Comment on the potential and limits of social audit.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Participation building trust, in one scene: villagers reading the muster roll aloud.

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q16 *“Social audits and outcome-based budgeting, meant to make welfare delivery answerable to beneficiaries, have largely become procedural rituals.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The trust test asked straight: the audits exist, do they convince anyone?

DAW 2026 · W8 Thu Q2 *“The Right to Information (RTI) Act promised an informed citizenry, yet the applicant today meets delay, evasion and a mounting backlog of appeals.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The transparency law, measured by what a citizen actually faces.

Q17 · 15 MARKS

Can the constitutional mandate of rights-based welfare be effectively realised in the context of non-integrated governance and minimal public investment? Examine.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Constitution and laws promise welfare as a right: food, work, education. The question asks whether rights can be delivered when departments do not work together and money is short.

IN SHORT The exam's exact axis was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2021 *"Performance of welfare schemes that are implemented for vulnerable sections is not so effective due to the absence of their awareness and active involvement at all stages of the policy process. Discuss."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The delivery gap: schemes without people's involvement.

2023 *"Development and welfare schemes for the vulnerable, by its nature, are discriminatory in approach.' Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The design critique: welfare that divides.

2013 *"Electronic cash transfer system for the welfare schemes is an ambitious project to minimize corruption, eliminate wastage and facilitate reforms. Comment."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The delivery machinery, asked early.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q4 *"Most welfare in India is delivered as discretionary schemes a government can expand or withdraw at will, while only a few benefits are legal entitlements. To what extent should welfare in India be founded on justiciable rights?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question was the same axis: rights against schemes. The line that holds the answer: a right without money and coordination behaves like a scheme.

DAW 2026 · W8 Thu Q5 *"Welfare entitlements remain anchored to a single registered home, leaving India's hundreds of millions of internal migrants uncovered at both origin and destination..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Weak coordination in one case: the migrant covered nowhere.

Q18 · 15 MARKS

Should education be treated primarily as a welfare obligation of the state or as a strategic investment for building a globally competitive, knowledge-driven nation? Critically evaluate.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Is education the state's duty of care, or the nation's investment in competing with the world? The question asks you to weigh both.

IN SHORT Both sides were in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *"The quality of higher education in India requires major improvement to make it internationally competitive."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The investment half.

2020 *"National Education Policy 2020 is in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goal-4 (2030). It intends to restructure and reorient the education system in India. Critically examine the statement."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The welfare half: education as a development promise.

2023 *"Skill development programmes have succeeded in increasing human resources supply to various sectors. In the context of the statement, analyze the linkages between education, skill, and employment."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The bridge between the two: education, skill, employment.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS2 · Set A · Q18 *"India's education system produces degrees, not employability. Elucidate, and indicate how the National Education Policy, 2020 can narrow this gap."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The investment half, with the fix attached: degrees without employability, and NEP to close the gap.

DAW 2026 · W8 Sat Q2 *"The Right to Education Act drove enrolment above 96 percent, yet surveys find nearly half of Class-5 children cannot read a Class-2 text."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The welfare half, measured by outcomes: enrolment near-complete, learning far behind.

Simulator Essay · Set A · Q6 *"A degree opens the gate, but the classroom decides who ever reaches it."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The whole debate in one line. The point to land: a system that fails to teach fails both ways.

Q19 · 15 MARKS

“India's global diaspora acts as a living bridge, as a critical economic factor and knowledge network in transforming cultural heritage into geopolitical influence and strategic leverage worldwide.” Critically examine this statement.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Indians abroad are called a living bridge: they send money home, build networks, carry culture, and win friends for India. The question asks you to test this claim.

IN SHORT The diaspora question returns. Both its sides were practised.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Indian diaspora has a decisive role to play in the politics and economy of America and European Countries.’ Comment with examples.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same claim of influence, six years earlier.

2017 “Indian Diaspora has an important role to play in South-East Asian countries' economy and society. Appraise the role of the Indian Diaspora in South-East Asia in this context.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, for another region.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS1 · Set B · Q10 “Compare the older indenture-era Indian diaspora with the recent skilled migrant, and explain why the former is often more culturally rooted.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Who the diaspora actually is, old and new. Set in GS1, asked in GS2.

DAW 2025 · W7D4 “The relationship between India and Canada has recently been under strain. Analyze the key irritants in the bilateral relationship and their impact on the Indian diaspora.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The testing half: what happens when politics strains the bridge. The Canada case.

Q20 · 15 MARKS

“China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has transformed South Asia from a regional space into a theatre of great power competition.” Analyse the strategic implications of the BRI for India's security and regional influence in South Asia.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT China's Belt and Road builds ports and roads across India's neighbourhood. The question asks what this does to India's security and standing in South Asia.

IN SHORT The lineage is old: 2013's String of Pearls grew into this.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 “China is using its economic relations and positive trade surplus as tools to develop potential military power status in Asia. In the light of this statement, discuss its impact on India as her neighbour.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The parent question: China's economics as strategy, on India's doorstep.

2013 “What do you understand by 'The String of Pearls'? How does it impact India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The grandparent: the same encirclement, before the BRI name.

2016 “Increasing cross-border terrorist attacks in India and growing interference in the internal affairs of member-states by Pakistan are not conducive for the future of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).”

HOW IT CONNECTS The neighbourhood under strain, then too.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Wed Q1 “Despite 'Neighbourhood First', India's influence in South Asia has slipped. How far is this loss of ground of India's own making?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The influence half: how much lost ground is India's own doing.

DAW 2026 · W7 Tue Q2 “The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor must cross a region in conflict and raise vast financing before it can move a single container.”

HOW IT CONNECTS India's corridor answer to the BRI.

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q2 “An adversary spreads disinformation, funds proxies and applies economic pressure, all while staying below the threshold that would justify a military response.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The security half: pressure kept below open war. Cases to name: Hambantota, Gwadar, the Maldives turn.

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

FREE GUIDANCE

Every free resource is at unlockias.in.

Stuck somewhere, or need direction? Ask on our Telegram channel [UPSCneil](https://t.me/UPSCneil).

MODULE QUERIES

Ping us directly at [@helpdeskupsc](https://t.me/helpdeskupsc) on Telegram, or call or message [+91 91130 79224](tel:+919113079224).

With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies III

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

We are not saying that every question could be completely answered from old UPSC papers or from DAW and the Sherlocking Simulators. That is not possible, and we will not pretend it is.

What we are showing is this: most of this paper came from familiar ground. A student who had gone through past-year questions, read the basic books, and practised answer writing had already met most of what this paper asks, only in different words.

This is why we keep repeating the same four things:

- Past-year questions show you what UPSC likes to ask, and how it asks.
- Basic sources give you the material.
- Answer-writing practice, DAW and the Simulators, trains you to brainstorm and structure an answer within time.
- The last piece is mindset. Go in expecting new words on familiar ground. Do not let a new-looking question shake you.

Where a link is only partial, we have said so on that page. Where a topic was simply new, we have said that too. No link here has been stretched.

Every quoted question is word for word from the actual papers and booklets. Compiled on 23 August 2026.

HOW MUCH OF EACH ANSWER WAS WITHIN REACH

These numbers are rough estimates, not measurements. For each question we asked one thing: a student who studied past-year questions, read the basic sources, and practised with DAW and the Simulators, how much of a full answer could that student build? The rest is execution: turning what you know into a written answer, within time, in the exam hall. That too is a skill, and practice builds it.

We have kept every number conservative, and none goes above 80 percent, because even a familiar question still has to be written well in the exam hall.

QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
Q1	Digital Rupee and CBDC	about 65%
Q2	Financial inclusion and the RBI index	about 80%
Q3	Technology Missions in agriculture	about 70%
Q4	Agri marketing and e-commerce	about 80%
Q5	Biotechnology for perishable crops	about 65%
Q6	Fast Breeder Reactor and criticality	about 75%
Q7	Infrastructure versus disaster risk	about 80%
Q8	Kunming-Montreal biodiversity framework	about 65%
Q9	Fake news and the IT Rules 2021	about 70%
Q10	Ladakh, BADP and Sixth Schedule	about 70%
Q11	Energy security	about 80%
Q12	Startups	about 70%
Q13	Food scarcity to surplus, and diversification	about 80%
Q14	Farm subsidies and the WTO	about 75%
Q15	Mission Drishti satellite	about 35%
Q16	Agentic AI	about 65%
Q17	Solid waste, Delhi and Indore	about 75%
Q18	Community participation in disasters	about 80%
Q19	J&K mainstreaming and Article 370	about 70%
Q20	Terror funding and FATF	about 80%

Q1 · 10 MARKS

What do you mean by Digital Rupee? In this context, explain the working and progress of India's Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC).

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Digital Rupee is cash in digital form, issued directly by the RBI. The question asks how it works and how far it has reached.

IN SHORT UPSC keeps asking about digital money. We practised the digital payment system the Digital Rupee sits inside.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2023 “What is the status of digitalization in the Indian economy? Examine the problems faced in this regard and suggest improvements.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Both questions are about money and business going digital in India. The Digital Rupee is the newest step of that same story.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q2 “India's Digital Public Infrastructure stack is built around UPI, the Open Network for Digital Commerce and the Account Aggregator framework. How does it drive economic growth and financial inclusion?”

HOW IT CONNECTS UPI moves money between bank accounts. The Digital Rupee is the RBI's own digital cash. Both belong to one digital payment system. Our question covered that system. To finish the 2026 answer, add how the e-rupee works: a wallet from your bank, notes in digital form, and pilot runs going on since 2022.

Q2 · 10 MARKS

Examine the view that financial inclusion is an integral part of social and economic inclusion in a country like India. Also throw light on the usefulness of the R.B.I.'s Financial Inclusion Index.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Financial inclusion means every family can use a bank account, credit and insurance. The question asks why this matters for social equality, and about the RBI index that measures it.

IN SHORT UPSC has asked this before, twice.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 “Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is necessary for bringing unbanked to the institutional finance fold. Do you agree with this for financial inclusion of the poorer section of the Indian society?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same subject: bringing poor families into banking. Jan Dhan is the scheme that did it. The words 'financial inclusion' appear in both questions.

2022 “Is inclusive growth possible under market economy? State the significance of financial inclusion in achieving economic growth in India.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked again: what financial inclusion does for growth. The 2026 question adds only the RBI index.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q2 “India's Digital Public Infrastructure stack is built around UPI, the Open Network for Digital Commerce and the Account Aggregator framework. How does it drive economic growth and financial inclusion? Examine the systemic risks of market concentration, data misuse and digital exclusion it carries.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked the same thing with today's tools: how UPI and digital systems bring people into banking, and who still gets left out. The words 'financial inclusion' are in our question too. The RBI's Financial Inclusion Index is one fact to add: a single number that tracks how many people can reach banking, how much they use it, and how good it is.

Q3 · 10 MARKS

Describe the various Technology Missions initiated in Indian agriculture and examine their role in food security.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Technology Missions are government programmes that use science to raise farm output. Examples: the missions on oilseeds, dairy, horticulture, and now digital farming.

IN SHORT An old UPSC theme in new words.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 *“Explain various types of revolutions that took place in agriculture after Independence in India. How have these revolutions helped in poverty alleviation and food security in India?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The 'revolutions', green for wheat and rice, white for milk, blue for fish, are the same story as the missions: science lifting farm output. Both questions end at the same place: food security.

2015 *“How can the Digital India program help farmers improve farm productivity and income? What steps has the government taken in this regard?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same idea: government technology reaching farmers.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q14 *“How can AgriStack, the farmer-data registry, and e-NAM strengthen agricultural marketing and improve price realisation for farmers?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question covered the newest technology mission in farming: digital records of farmers and an online market. The older mission names, oilseeds, dairy, horticulture, come from standard book material.

Q4 · 10 MARKS

Explain the factors responsible for inefficiency of agri-produce marketing. How e-commerce helps to reduce inefficiency of agri-produce marketing? Explain.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Why do farmers get poor prices for what they grow, and can selling online fix it?

IN SHORT UPSC has joined three of its own old questions into one.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “What are the main constraints in transport and marketing of agricultural produce in India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The first half of the 2026 question, in almost the same words. 'Marketing of agricultural produce' appears in both.

2022 “What are the main bottlenecks in the upstream and downstream process of marketing of agricultural products in India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same first half, asked again two years later.

2023 “How does e-Technology help farmers in production and marketing of agricultural produce? Explain it.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The second half of the 2026 question. 'e-Technology' there and 'e-commerce' here mean the same thing: selling farm produce online.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q14 “How can AgriStack, the farmer-data registry, and e-NAM strengthen agricultural marketing and improve price realisation for farmers?”

HOW IT CONNECTS e-NAM, in our question, is the government's own online mandi. Writing about it is writing the e-commerce half of this answer. The problems list, too many middlemen, poor storage, small broken markets, is the standard first half.

Q5 · 10 MARKS

Explain by giving two examples, how biotechnology has helped the Indian farmers in processing their perishable crops.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Perishable crops spoil fast: fruit, vegetables, milk. The question asks how biotechnology helps farmers process and save them, with two examples.

IN SHORT Biotechnology comes on this paper again and again.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *“How can biotechnology help to improve the living standards of farmers?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, wider. 2026 narrows it to crops that spoil, and asks for two examples.

2021 *“What are the research and developmental achievements in applied biotechnology? How will these achievements help to uplift the poorer sections of society?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Biotechnology for the poor, asked again.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q4 *“Examine how stronger food processing can cut post-harvest losses, raise farm incomes, and create non-farm manufacturing jobs.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question was about processing farm produce so it does not go waste. That is exactly where this 2026 question lives. 'Post-harvest losses' is the formal name for crops spoiling after harvest.

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q3 *“Discuss the potential of gene-edited crops for food and climate security and the biosafety and intellectual property concerns involved.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The biotechnology side, practised on crops. Two examples for the exam: tomatoes bred to stay firm longer, and enzymes used to make juice and cheese.

Q6 · 10 MARKS

Distinguish between a Fast Breeder Reactor (FBR) and a thermal nuclear reactor. In the context of first indigenously developed prototype FBR at Kalpakkam, explain the term 'criticality'. What are its implications for clean energy future of our country?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT A normal reactor burns uranium. A Fast Breeder Reactor makes more fuel than it burns. India built its own at Kalpakkam. 'Criticality' is the point where the reactor's chain reaction keeps itself going.

IN SHORT UPSC asked about the Fast Breeder Reactor in 2017 itself.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 *"Give an account of the growth and development of nuclear science and technology in India. What is the advantage of the fast breeder reactor program in India?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same reactor, asked directly. 'Fast breeder reactor' appears in both questions.

2018 *"With growing energy needs, should India keep on expanding its nuclear energy program? Discuss the facts and fears associated with nuclear energy."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The clean-energy half: should India grow nuclear power.

2025 *"The fusion energy programme in India has steadily evolved over the past few decades. Mention India's contributions to the international fusion energy project..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Last year the same slot went to fusion energy. A nuclear question comes almost every other year.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q16 *"India aims for 100 GW nuclear power by 2047 via private investment and SMRs. Can these scale India's baseload clean energy? Examine the hurdles, including those in the fuel cycle."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question covered nuclear power as clean energy, and named the fuel cycle as a hurdle. The FBR at Kalpakkam is stage two of that very fuel cycle: India's three-stage plan to stretch its small uranium into its huge thorium.

Q7 · 10 MARKS

Discuss how the contradiction between 'rapid infrastructure development' and 'disaster-risk reduction' in ecologically-sensitive areas of India can be managed, with suitable examples.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Roads, dams and hotels are coming up fast in fragile hills and coasts. Building fast invites disasters. Not building slows growth. The question asks how to manage this clash.

IN SHORT We practised this exact clash.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2021 “Describe the various causes and effects of landslides. Mention the important components of the National Landslide Risk Management Strategy.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Landslides are what happens when fragile slopes are disturbed by construction. The same ground.

2016 “With reference to National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) guidelines, discuss the measures to be adopted to mitigate the impact of the recent incidents of cloudbursts in many places in Uttarakhand.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same setting: sudden disasters in fragile hills.

2019 “Disaster preparedness is the first step in any disaster management process. Explain how hazard zonation mapping will help disaster mitigation in the case of landslides.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The main solution for the 2026 answer is here: map the risky zones first, then decide where to build.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q17 “Cloudbursts and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) increasingly cascade into compound Himalayan disasters as unregulated construction pushes settlements past fragile slopes' carrying capacity. Analyse the causes.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question stated the exam's exact clash: construction pushing beyond what fragile slopes can carry.

DAW 2026 · W3 Mon Q2 “Large Himalayan hydropower cannot be justified until glacial- lake outburst flood risk is mapped and managed. Critically analyse.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same clash, practised on dams: no big project before the flood risk is mapped. Examples ready for the exam: Joshimath's sinking, the Chardham road, Sikkim's dam flood of 2023.

Q8 · 10 MARKS

Discuss the aim and goals of Kunming-Montreal global biodiversity framework. Mention India's commitments and initiatives to achieve the goals and targets of this framework giving suitable examples.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The Kunming-Montreal framework is the world's 2022 agreement to save nature. Its most famous promise: protect 30 percent of the world's land and sea by 2030.

IN SHORT A new name on an old theme.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“How does biodiversity vary in India? How is the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 helpful in the conservation of flora and fauna?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Biodiversity and India's law for protecting it, asked directly. 2026 adds the new global agreement on top of the same subject.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q7 *“How can Ramsar wetlands and marine protected areas help India meet its 30x30 conservation target, and how can this be reconciled with a sustainable blue economy? Discuss.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS '30x30' in our question is the flagship target of this very framework: 30 percent protected by 2030. Our question asked how India can reach it, through protected wetlands and marine parks. Those are the India examples the 2026 question wants.

DAW 2026 · W3 Wed Q4 *“India counts a monoculture plantation and an old-growth forest in the same tree-cover figure, even as natural forest shrinks.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS A point that lifts the answer: planting rows of one tree is not the same as saving a real forest. Targets can look met on paper while nature still loses.

Q9 · 10 MARKS

Explain how fake news and disinformation pose threat to Internal Security and Public Order in Indian context? In this regard, discuss salient features of amendments in respect of Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT False news spreads fast online and can trigger riots, panic and violence. The question asks how this threatens security, and about the 2021 IT Rules that govern online platforms.

IN SHORT UPSC asked this in 2016 and again in 2024.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 *“The use of the internet and social media by non-state actors for subversive activities is a major security concern. How have these been misused in the recent past? Suggest effective guidelines to curb the above threat.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same threat and the same ask for rules, ten years earlier. Even the demand for 'guidelines' matches the IT Rules part of 2026.

2024 *“Social media and encrypting messaging services pose a serious security challenge. What measures have been adopted at various levels to address the security implications of social media?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked again just two years ago. 'Social media' and 'security' appear in both.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q2 *“An adversary spreads disinformation, funds proxies and applies economic pressure, all while staying below the threshold that would justify a military response.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question covered disinformation as a weapon: lies spread on purpose to hurt a country.

DAW 2026 · W7 Thu Q2 *“A young man self-radicalises entirely online, joins no organisation and meets no handler, so an apparatus built to watch groups never sees him.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS And what online content can do to one person: a youth turned extremist alone on his phone. The IT Rules amendments are the current-affairs layer to add on top.

Q10 · 10 MARKS

Ladakh is strategically located between China and Pakistan. As a measure to win hearts and minds of locals, discuss the Border Area Development Programmes (BADP) by the Central Government and civic actions by the Army. Also discuss demand of promulgation of provision of the Sixth Schedule of constitution for Ladakh.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Ladakh touches both China and Pakistan. The question asks how development schemes and the Army's welfare work win local support, and covers Ladakh's demand for Sixth Schedule status, special protection for tribal areas.

IN SHORT We practised this ground, and UPSC has asked it before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *"For effective border area management, discuss the steps required to deny local support to militants and also suggest ways to manage favorable perception among locals."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Almost the same words: keep border people on your side. 'Favorable perception among locals' then, 'hearts and minds' now.

2016 *"Border management is a complex task due to difficult terrain and hostile relations with some countries. Elucidate the challenges and strategies for effective border management."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Border management, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q20 *"Compare the people-centric Vibrant Villages Programme with the infrastructure-and-technology approach of border roads, tunnels and surveillance in strengthening border security. How do they together build a holistic border-management strategy?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question compared the two ways to secure a border: care for the people, or build roads and fences. BADP and Army civic action are the 'care for the people' way, under older names.

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q4 *"In the light of the view that securing India's frontiers depends as much on keeping its remote border villages alive and connected as on fences and troops, critically analyse how India should weight the two."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same point again: a living border village guards the border better than an empty one. The Sixth Schedule demand is the current-affairs tail: Ladakh's people want constitutional protection for their land and culture.

Q11 · 15 MARKS

Explain the key challenges for India's energy security. What measures do you suggest for ensuring energy security along with economic growth and sustainability?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT India imports most of its oil. The question asks what threatens our energy supply, and how to secure it while the economy grows and stays clean.

IN SHORT UPSC has asked this before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 “Do you think India will meet 50 percent of its energy needs from renewable energy by 2030? Justify your answer. How will the shift of subsidies from fossil fuels to renewable help achieve the above objective?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The same subject: meeting energy needs while going green.

2025 “How can India achieve energy independence through clean technology by 2047? How can biotechnology play a crucial role in this endeavour?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Energy independence, asked just last year. The theme repeats almost yearly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q5 “With non-fossil sources now half of India's installed capacity, examine the challenges of integrating variable renewable power into grids, including storage and transmission. How far can green hydrogen address them?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The hardest part of this answer was our full question: sun and wind do not shine and blow all day, so the grid needs storage and strong wires to stay stable.

DAW 2026 · W3 Fri Q1 “India risks trading dependence on imported oil for dependence on imported minerals. Comment.”

HOW IT CONNECTS A key challenge in simple words: solar panels and batteries need imported minerals, so we may swap one dependence for another.

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q16 “India aims for 100 GW nuclear power by 2047 via private investment and SMRs. Can these scale India's baseload clean energy?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The nuclear option for round-the-clock clean power, practised too.

Q12 · 15 MARKS

How are startups in India promoting entrepreneurship, innovation and employment?
Discuss the global and domestic challenges in their working and suggest suitable measures to overcome these challenges.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Startups are young companies built on new ideas. The question asks what they do for jobs and innovation, what troubles them, and the fixes.

IN SHORT Startups appear on this paper for the first time. Their parts, jobs, innovation, funding, were in our practice.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

Said honestly: startups have not been asked directly on this paper before. This is a first-time question. What was old is its parts, jobs, innovation and funding, and those were in our practice.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q12 *“Can the Employment Linked Incentive scheme and gig worker welfare funds turn jobless growth into inclusive, quality employment? Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The jobs half: can new schemes turn growth into employment. Startups are one big hope for those jobs.

DAW 2026 · W4 Sat Q1 *“India's research and development spend is about 0.65% of national income and overwhelmingly state-funded, while innovation leaders had private firms doing the spending.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The innovation half: India spends little on research, and mostly through government. Startups are the private risk-takers who change that.

DAW 2026 · W4 Tue Q1 *“Corporate profits are high, rates have eased and taxes were cut, yet private firms have not invested at scale for a decade.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The money problem: private investors holding back. For startups this has a name, the 'funding winter'.

Q13 · 15 MARKS

How Indian agriculture has been transformed from food scarcity to food surplus level? Explain the various government policies implemented for diversification of Indian agriculture.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT India once imported food. Today its godowns overflow. The question asks how this turnaround happened, and what policies push farmers to grow more than just rice and wheat.

IN SHORT UPSC has asked both halves before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2017 “Explain various types of revolutions that took place in agriculture after Independence in India. How have these revolutions helped in poverty alleviation and food security in India?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The first half of 2026 is this old question: the Green Revolution and its siblings took India from scarcity to surplus.

2021 “What are the present challenges before crop diversification? How do emerging technologies provide opportunities for crop diversification?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The second half, asked directly. 'Crop diversification' appears in both.

2024 “Elucidate the importance of buffer stocks for stabilizing agricultural prices in India. What are the challenges associated with the storage of buffer stock?”

HOW IT CONNECTS The surplus end of the story: godowns so full that storage itself became the problem.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q13 “India stays heavily import-dependent for edible oils and pulses despite cereal self-sufficiency. What factors explain this dependence, and how can a cropping-pattern shift towards oilseeds and pulses build self-reliance in these commodities?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question was diversification itself: plenty of rice and wheat, too little oilseed and dal, and the policy push needed to change what farmers grow.

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q14 “Millets and other nutri-cereals are climate-resilient crops for a warming India. How can mainstreaming them in production and diets strengthen nutrition security?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Diversification again, through millets.

Q14 · 15 MARKS

Discuss the different types of subsidies and supports provided by the Government of India to agricultural sector. Examine the related issues pertaining to Agreement on Agriculture of World Trade Organisation (WTO).

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The government supports farmers with cheap fertiliser, power, credit and assured prices (MSP). The question asks about these supports, and why world trade rules object to some of them.

IN SHORT Both halves are old UPSC questions.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *“What are the different types of agriculture subsidies given to farmers at the national and at state levels? Critically analyse the agricultural subsidy regime with reference to the distortions created by it.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The first half of 2026, in almost the same words. 'Types of agriculture subsidies' appears in both.

2013 *“Food Security Bill is expected to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in India. Critically discuss various apprehensions in its effective implementation along with the concerns it has generated in WTO.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The WTO half, asked the same year: India's food schemes rubbing against world trade rules.

2017 *“How do subsidies affect the cropping pattern, crop diversity, and economy of farmers? What is the significance of crop insurance, minimum support price, and food processing for small and marginal farmers?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Subsidies and what they do to farming, asked again.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q13 *“Assess how institutional credit and crop insurance, especially KCC, PMFBY and Farmer Producer Organisations, stabilise farmer incomes.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The support system, cheap credit and crop insurance, was our full question.

DAW 2026 · W4 Wed Q3 *“Do you agree that a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price would serve Indian agriculture? Substantiate.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The biggest support debate, a legal MSP, practised directly. The WTO point to add: buying crops at MSP counts as trade-distorting support under WTO rules, and India defends it using the 'peace clause'.

Q15 · 15 MARKS

Mention salient features of 'Mission Drishti'. Discuss the imaging techniques used in the satellite launched on 3rd May 2026. Why it is being considered world's first satellite of its kind?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT A satellite launched on 3 May 2026. The question asks about its features and its imaging technology.

IN SHORT The satellite is new. The question type is old.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *"What do you understand by "Standard Positioning System" and "Precision Positioning System" in the GPS era? Discuss the advantages India perceives from its ambitious IRNSS program employing just seven satellites."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same type of question a decade ago: name a satellite programme, explain its technology, say what India gains.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · W4 Fri Q1 *"India has a respected space programme but a tiny share of the global space economy. Comment on whether opening the sector to private companies can close that gap."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The space-programme ground, practised again. The mission's own details come from May 2026 current affairs. What practice gave you is the way to answer any named-satellite question: features, technology, and why it matters for India.

Q16 · 15 MARKS

What is agentic Artificial Intelligence (AI)? Explain its working. Describe its applications with suitable examples. Discuss the advantages, risks and challenges associated with agentic AI systems.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Ordinary AI answers your question. Agentic AI goes further: it plans steps and completes tasks on its own, like booking, searching and writing in sequence. The question asks how it works, its uses and its dangers.

IN SHORT The shape of the AI question returns. Agentic AI itself is new content.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2023 *“Introduce the concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI). How does AI help clinical diagnosis? Do you perceive any threat to privacy of the individual in the use of AI in healthcare?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question shape: define AI, give its uses, weigh its risks. 2026 swaps healthcare for 'agentic'.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q5 *“India is pursuing a "sovereign AI" model, controlling its own AI compute, data and models. Examine the case for this approach. How should India regulate frontier technologies and counter the growing menace of deepfakes and AI-generated fake audio and video? Discuss.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS New AI, its dangers, and how to control it: our full question. 'Frontier technologies' there covers systems like agentic AI.

DAW 2026 · W4 Fri Q3 *“Regulate Artificial Intelligence now and risk strangling a young industry; wait, and risk its harms hardening before the law arrives. Which error should India rather make?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The risks-and-challenges half, practised as a debate: act early or wait and watch.

Q17 · 15 MARKS

What are the challenges to solid waste management in India? Discuss the governmental policy framework on solid waste management. Discuss the success/failure cases of Delhi and Indore cities highlighting the salient feature of their solid waste management initiatives.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Indian cities make mountains of garbage. The question asks why managing it is hard, what the rules say, and why Indore succeeds while Delhi struggles.

IN SHORT UPSC asked this in 2018. The two city examples are the new part.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“What are the impediments in disposing of the huge quantities of discarded solid wastes which are continuously being generated? How do we safely remove the toxic wastes that have been accumulating?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question, eight years earlier. 'Solid wastes' and their disposal problems, in both.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Wed Q5 *“A circular economy is a more durable answer to plastic than bans. Critically evaluate.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question covered the modern answer to waste: reduce, reuse and recycle, instead of collect and dump. For the city examples: Indore separates waste at every doorstep and tops the cleanliness rankings. Delhi's unsorted waste keeps growing into landfill hills. The policy names: Solid Waste Management Rules 2016, Swachh Bharat Mission.

Q18 · 15 MARKS

“Community participation is the cornerstone of effective disaster management”. Analyse this statement with suitable examples from India. Also discuss the challenges to community participation and measures to strengthen it.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT When disaster strikes, neighbours reach first, long before any government team. The question asks why people's participation matters in disaster management, what weakens it, and how to strengthen it.

IN SHORT Our practice question said the same thing.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 “Discuss the recent measures initiated in disaster management by the Government of India departing from the earlier reactive approach.”

HOW IT CONNECTS The background of the 2026 question: India's shift from reacting after disasters to preparing before them. Prepared communities are the heart of that shift.

2013 “How important are vulnerability and risk assessment for pre-disaster management? As an administrator, what are key areas that you would focus on in a Disaster Management System?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Disaster preparation asked from the ground level.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W3 Tue Q2 “A flash flood strikes at 2 a.m. before any agency mobilises; the first responders are neighbours with boats. Does this make the trained community the real first line of defence, or only the unavoidable one until the State arrives?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is the exam's statement in a single scene: a flood at 2 a.m., and neighbours with boats saving lives first. Examples ready: Odisha's village-run cyclone shelters, the Aapda Mitra volunteer scheme.

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q7 “Heat waves increasingly threaten Indian cities and the urban poor. Explain how Heat Action Plans reduce this toll, and examine the gaps that limit their effectiveness on the ground.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Community-level planning and its gaps, practised through heat waves.

Q19 · 15 MARKS

Separatist movements have been one of the major factors contributing to militancy and instability in Jammu & Kashmir (J & K). Bring out actions taken by the Government to bring J & K into national mainstream. Discuss pre and post abrogation status of Articles 370 and 35A. Also bring out positive impacts of abrogation of both articles in mainstreaming the state.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The question asks what the government did to bring Jammu and Kashmir closer to the rest of India, and what changed after Article 370's special status was removed in 2019.

IN SHORT The theme is old. The Article 370 timeline is standard current affairs.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *"The banning of 'Jamaat-e-Islami' in Jammu and Kashmir brought into focus the role of over-ground workers (OGWs)..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Militancy in J&K, asked the very year the articles were removed.

2023 *"Winning of 'Hearts and Minds' in terrorism-affected areas is an essential step in restoring the trust of the population. Discuss the measures adopted by the Government in this respect."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The mainstreaming half of 2026: winning back people's trust, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set B · Q9 *"India was declared free of Left-Wing Extremism, districts falling from over a hundred to nil. What challenges arise in holding and developing the cleared areas, and how can resurgence be prevented?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question taught the same lesson in another region: when violence ends, the hard part begins, holding the area with development, jobs and trust. The J&K answer runs on exactly this lesson.

Q20 · 15 MARKS

Discuss counterfeit currency and money laundering as major sources of terror funding in India. State the actions being taken at International level to check these menaces. Highlight the role of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and methods of compliance by its member states in preventing terror funding.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Terrorists need money. Fake currency notes and money laundering, making dirty money look clean, supply it. The question asks how the world checks this, and about FATF, the global watchdog on terror money.

IN SHORT UPSC has asked almost every part of this before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *“Money laundering poses a serious security threat to a country's economic sovereignty. What is its significance for India and what steps are required to be taken to control this menace?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Money laundering as a security threat, asked directly.

2017 *“The scourge of terrorism is a grave challenge to national security. What solutions do you suggest to curb this growing menace? What are the major sources of terrorist funding?”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Sources of terror money, asked directly.

2023 *“Give out the major sources of terror funding in India and the efforts being made to curtail these sources. In this light, also discuss the aim and objective of the No Money for Terror...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Almost the same question, three years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS3 · Set A · Q9 *“Crypto-asset-based money laundering and terror financing test India's PMLA-FATF framework. Examine measures needed to strengthen it against these threats.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS FATF itself was in our question, in its newest form: dirty money moving through crypto coins. PMLA is India's anti-laundering law.

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q3 *“Cryptocurrencies and virtual digital assets have opened a channel for money laundering and terror financing that India's banking-era controls cannot easily track. Comment.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same ground practised again. Fake currency is the older half, from standard material.

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

FREE GUIDANCE

Every free resource is at unlockias.in.

Stuck somewhere, or need direction? Ask on our Telegram channel [UPSCneil](https://t.me/UPSCneil).

MODULE QUERIES

Ping us directly at [@helpdeskupsc](https://t.me/helpdeskupsc) on Telegram, or call or message [+91 91130 79224](tel:+919113079224).

With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies IV

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

We are not saying that every question could be completely answered from old UPSC papers or from DAW and the Sherlocking Simulators. That is not possible, and we will not pretend it is.

What we are showing is this: most of this paper came from familiar ground. A student who had gone through past-year questions, read the basic books, and practised answer writing had already met most of what this paper asks, only in different words.

This is why we keep repeating the same four things:

- Past-year questions show you what UPSC likes to ask, and how it asks.
- Basic sources give you the material.
- Answer-writing practice, DAW and the Simulators, trains you to brainstorm and structure an answer within time.
- The last piece is mindset. Go in expecting new words on familiar ground. Do not let a new-looking question shake you.

Where a link is only partial, we have said so on that page. Where a topic was simply new, we have said that too. No link here has been stretched.

Every quoted question is word for word from the actual papers and booklets. Compiled on 23 August 2026.

HOW MUCH OF EACH ANSWER WAS WITHIN REACH

These numbers are rough estimates, not measurements. For each question we asked one thing: a student who studied past-year questions, read the basic sources, and practised with DAW and the Simulators, how much of a full answer could that student build? The rest is execution: turning what you know into a written answer, within time, in the exam hall. That too is a skill, and practice builds it.

We have kept every number conservative, and none goes above 80 percent, because even a familiar question still has to be written well in the exam hall.

For the case studies, the number means how much of the thinking frame was familiar. The case itself is always resolved fresh in the hall.

QUESTION	TOPIC	WITHIN REACH
Q1(a)	AI, accountability and integrity	about 70%
Q1(b)	Displacing a forest community	about 80%
Q2(a)	Untested remedy on a tribe	about 65%
Q2(b)	Security versus human rights	about 70%
Q3(a)	Ambedkar and civil disobedience	about 80%
Q3(b)	Gandhi's trusteeship	about 75%
Q3(c)	Shakespeare: arms and intent	about 80%
Q4(a)	Paternalism and beneficence	about 75%
Q4(b)	Efficiency versus effectiveness	about 70%
Q5(a)	School rules versus children's rights	about 80%
Q5(b)	Ethics in international relations	about 80%
Q6(a)	Empathy versus rules, and the PA	about 75%
Q6(b)	Duty versus charity	about 65%
Q7	The consent case (Dr. Mansi)	about 70%
Q8	AI predictive policing (Ravi)	about 75%
Q9	The tout network (Seema)	about 80%
Q10	Biometric gatekeeping (Vikas)	about 80%
Q11	The divided district (Rajan)	about 70%
Q12	The arms sale (Ajit)	about 70%

Q1(A) · 10 MARKS

Owing to paucity of time, a university professor generates a Ph.D. evaluation report using Artificial Intelligence and submits it with some modifications. Discuss this from the perspective of accountability and integrity.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT A professor lets AI do his judging work and signs it as his own. The question asks what this does to accountability, owning your work, and integrity, honesty in it.

IN SHORT The AI-and-ethics question was in our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“The application of Artificial Intelligence as a dependable source of input for administrative rational decision-making is a debatable issue.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS AI as a helper in official judgement was asked directly, two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q11 *“Critically analyse, in the present context of AI-assisted administration, the claim that where a citizen's benefit or liberty is at stake, an algorithm must never be the final authority.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is this question's core rule: a machine may assist, but a human must own the judgement. The professor broke exactly that rule. The Ph.D. student's fate deserved his mind, not a machine's.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q1 *“In the age of synthetic media, a fabricated video is conceived by one person who creates it, amplified by a platform whose algorithm rewards reach, and spread by thousands of citizens...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Who is responsible when a machine sits between a person and the outcome? Our question practised that chain of responsibility.

Q1(B) · 10 MARKS

A business house is working on a project that could displace a forest community from their habitat. As the administrative officer of that district, what ethical challenges are you likely to face?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Development on one side, a community's home on the other, and you in the middle. The question asks what ethical pulls you will feel.

IN SHORT UPSC asked this in 2018. Our case bank carried it too.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *“Suppose the Government of India is thinking of constructing a dam in a mountain valley bound by forests and inhabited by ethnic communities.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same dilemma, in almost the same setting: a project, a forest, a community that lives there.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Sat Q2 *“Ravindra Naik, a District Collector, is directed to acquire land for an irrigation reservoir that will benefit several drought-prone districts downstream. A part of the submergence zone falls in a Scheduled Area where tribal families have farmed and lived for generations, and the Gram Sabha has refused consent...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our full case is this question with a name. The pulls are the same: the greater good against a community's consent, rehabilitation promises against their record of failure, duty to the state against duty to the weakest.

Q2(A) · 10 MARKS

An endangered tribe has developed a severe skeletal deformity. A university research has identified a mineral supplement as a possible remedy, though clinical trials are yet to be conducted. Should the District Magistrate (DM) use this research on the tribe? Discuss from the perspective of medical and administrative ethics.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT A possible cure exists, but it is untested. The people are vulnerable. The question asks whether an officer may use untested science on them.

IN SHORT The untested-remedy dilemma was in our case bank.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“Sneha is a Senior Manager working for a big reputed hospital chain in a mid-sized city.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Medical ethics entered the paper through a case, two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q14 *“Kavya is the ethics officer of a fast-growing health-tech firm racing two rivals to launch a diagnostic AI tool. Days before launch, validation shows the model is markedly accurate for one demographic group but quietly under-performs for another...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case is the same dilemma in a lab coat: something unproven, pushed onto people before testing is complete. The rule both answers rest on: do not experiment on people without consent and trials.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q2 *“Examine the significance of privacy and informed consent as ethical values in a digital welfare state.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Informed consent, the heart of this answer, was our theory question.

Q2(B) · 10 MARKS

Discuss how national security can be balanced with concerns of human rights.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The state must keep people safe, and it must not crush the people it protects. The question asks how to hold both.

IN SHORT The balance was practised through our border case.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *“The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Power restrained by moral duty is this question's exact idea, asked in 2020.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q19 *“Devika is the Divisional Commissioner of a border district. Across the border, in a strictly neighbouring country, fighting has driven civilians from their homes.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case put security against humanity at a border fence: injured civilians pleading to cross, armed men mixed among them. Writing it is writing this answer with a story in hand.

DAW 2026 · W7 Fri Q1 *“India's anti-terror laws permit years of detention but secure a conviction in a small fraction of cases.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same balance in law: strong powers for safety, and what they cost the innocent. From our GS3 bank. Ethics travels across papers.

Q3(A) · 10 MARKS

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had cautioned that employing civil disobedience within a constitutional democracy equates to endorsing 'anarchy'. How should modern democracies navigate the ethical dilemmas posed by civil disobedience movements that aim to promote social justice against policies that may raise genuine concerns?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Ambedkar said that once we have a Constitution, protest must flow through it. But some protests fight for justice itself. The question asks how a democracy should treat them.

IN SHORT Our question quoted the very same 1949 speech.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2019 *"What is meant by the term 'constitutional morality'? How does one uphold constitutional morality?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Constitutional morality, the idea this question stands on, asked directly.

2025 *"Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment but a product of civil education and adherence of the rule of law."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked again just last year.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W5 Thu Q1 *"Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, in his final address to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949, observed: 'However good a Constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it, happen to be a bad lot.'"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The 'anarchy' caution in the exam comes from this same final address. Our question made you study that speech and what it demands of public life.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q4 *"Differentiate constitutional morality from social or majoritarian morality, and state which should guide a public servant when they clash."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The answer's frame: when the crowd and the Constitution disagree, the Constitution wins. Movements for justice must still walk its path.

Q3(B) · 10 MARKS

In what ways can an Indian Administrative Officer apply Gandhi's notion of 'trusteeship' to ensure fairness in governance?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Gandhi's trusteeship: what you hold, you hold for others. For an officer, the office, its funds and its powers belong to the people. The question asks how to live this.

IN SHORT Trusteeship of public office was our direct question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2016 *"Discuss Mahatma Gandhi's Concept of Seven Sins."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Gandhi's moral ideas, asked directly.

2013 *"The good of an individual is contained in the good of all.' What do you understand by this statement? How can this principle be implemented in public life?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The idea inside trusteeship: what is yours is held for everyone.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W5 Fri Q1 *"A public office is held in trust for the people who are governed, and not as a personal entitlement of the one who occupies it."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is Gandhi's trusteeship applied to the officer's chair, word for word the same idea. Fairness follows from it: funds, appointments and decisions used only for those they are held for.

Q3(C) · 10 MARKS

Shakespeare in Henry IV says, "The arms are fair when the intent of bearing them is just". What ethical implications does this have in governance?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Shakespeare says a weapon is right only if the purpose behind it is right. In governance: power is judged by the intention and the cause it serves. The question asks what follows.

IN SHORT The means-ends-intention debate was asked in 2018 and practised in our bank.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2018 *"With regard to the morality of actions, one view is that means are of paramount importance, and the other view is that the ends justify the means."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same debate, asked directly: what makes an action right, the means or the end?

2014 *"Human beings should always be treated as 'ends' in themselves and never as merely 'means'. Explain the meaning and significance of this statement."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Kant's version of the same question.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Tue Q1 *"An honest officer adopts a means that is entirely proper, a fair and open tender, yet the outcome harms the very poor she meant to serve, while a colleague who quietly bends a procedure secures a far better result for them."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question weighed intention, means and consequence against each other, which is exactly what the Shakespeare line asks of power. The answer's caution: just intent cannot bless unjust means for long.

Q4(A) · 10 MARKS

Citing the serious adverse effects of long-term medication, a doctor convinces the family of a female patient for surgery. This led the patient to reluctantly consent for the surgery, though her original choice was to opt for medication. Explain the concepts of paternalism and beneficence by analysing the doctor's action.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Paternalism: deciding for someone for their own good. Beneficence: acting to do good. The doctor meant well but overrode the patient's own choice. The question asks you to weigh the two.

IN SHORT The consent-versus-good-intention tension runs through our medical case too.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 “Sneha is a Senior Manager working for a big reputed hospital chain in a mid-sized city.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Medical ethics through a case, two years ago.

2018 “Dr X is a leading medical practitioner in a city. He has set up a charitable trust through which he plans to establish a super-speciality hospital...”

HOW IT CONNECTS A doctor's duties, asked through a case then too.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Fri Q5 “Dr. Meera Iyer is the medical superintendent of a district government hospital during a severe seasonal outbreak of viral fever that has filled the wards.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our medical case practised the same ground: a doctor's good intentions tested against fairness and the patient's own claim.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q3 “Discuss the ethical considerations when the state shapes citizens' pro-social attitudes. Where does legitimate persuasion end and manipulation begin?”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our theory question drew the exact line this answer needs: helping someone choose is fair, choosing for them is not.

Q4(B) · 10 MARKS

Efficiency is doing things right, while effectiveness is doing the right thing. How do you strike a balance between the two to enhance productivity?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Efficiency: follow the process well. Effectiveness: make sure the process serves its real purpose. The question asks how to hold both.

IN SHORT The efficiency-versus-purpose tension was our practice question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *“A mere compliance with law is not enough, the public servant also has to have a well-developed sensibility to ethical issues for effective discharge of duties.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same distinction in older words: following rules is not the same as serving the purpose.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q13 *“In the drive to meet delivery targets, a welfare administration can quietly reduce the poorest to numbers on a dashboard rather than persons at a counter. Efficiency, pursued for its own sake, risks stripping the beneficiary of dignity.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is this question with a face on it: efficiency chased for itself, and the right thing lost on the way. The balance both answers reach: efficiency must serve effectiveness, never replace it.

Q5(A) · 10 MARKS

Usually schools, working in remote areas, do not fully comply with government regulations. However, if the rules are enforced strictly, it would lead to most schools closing down. How should an administrator strike a balance between enforcement of rules and educational rights of children?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Enforce the rules fully and children lose their schools. Ignore the rules and standards die. The question asks how an officer balances the two.

IN SHORT Compassionate rule-bending was our direct question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *"The Supreme Court has banned mining in the Aravalli Hills to stop forest degradation and maintain ecological balance. However, illegal stone mining is still rampant..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same shape: a rule that is right, and a ground reality that resists it.

2020 *"Distinguish between laws and rules. Discuss the role of ethics in formulating them."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Rules and the ethics behind them, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q3 *"Is compassionate rule-bending ever ethically defensible, or does it inevitably corrode probity by setting a precedent? Discuss with suitable examples."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is this question's engine: when may an officer soften a rule for a larger good? The answer's path: enforce in spirit, give time to comply, never let the child pay for the school's faults.

DAW 2026 · W6 Wed Q2 *"A municipal commissioner finds that the law clearly permits her to grant a building completion certificate to a developer who has met every written requirement, yet she k..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same tension from the other side: the letter of the rule against what is actually right.

Q5(B) · 10 MARKS

In international relations, ethical considerations are often subjugated to the strategic interests of nation-states. Discuss this from an ethical perspective.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Countries preach values but act on interests. The question asks whether ethics has any real place between nations.

IN SHORT UPSC has asked this before.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *"The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same question: can power between nations be tamed by ethics? Asked in 2020, in the same IR context.

2017 *"Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Ethics in international relations, asked directly.

2023 *"International aid' is an accepted form of helping 'resource-challenged' nations. Comment on 'ethics in contemporary international aid'."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Asked again through aid.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q1 *"A rising power is no longer merely a claimant in global governance but increasingly a maker of its rules. As its capacity grows, it begins to set the terms that weaker nations must live by..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked what ethics demands of a nation as its power grows. The same debate, from the side of the strong.

Q6(A) · 10 MARKS

On the request of his Personal Assistant (PA), the District Magistrate (DM) stops the transfer of a schoolteacher who takes private tuition for his daughter diagnosed with learning disability. In this context, discuss the aspects of empathy versus compliance with rules.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The DM's reason is kind, but the favour flows to his own staff. The question asks where empathy ends and misuse of office begins.

IN SHORT Empathy against rules was our direct question.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 *“Apart from intellectual competency and moral qualities, empathy and compassion are some of the other vital attributes...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Empathy as an officer's quality, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

DAW 2026 · W5 Mon Q2 *“During a disaster relief drive a District Officer faces a grieving family that pleads, with great emotion, for a benefit for which they are clearly not eligible under the relief norms.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is the same test: real sympathy, clear rules, and the officer in between. The added edge here: the beneficiary is his own PA, so a conflict of interest rides on top of the empathy.

DAW 2026 · W6 Thu Q1 *“A senior official must decide on a regulatory clearance for a company in which he still holds a modest block of shares inherited some years ago.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The conflict-of-interest half: good intentions do not clean a decision that favours your own circle.

Q6(B) · 10 MARKS

Some moral philosophers argue that spending some of your resources, without significantly affecting your financial stability, to help other people who badly suffer is our moral duty and not merely a matter of charity. Justify this claim by explaining the distinction between duty and charity.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Charity is a choice we are praised for. Duty is what we owe. The claim: if helping costs us little and saves someone from real suffering, it is owed, not optional. The question asks you to justify this.

IN SHORT The duty-versus-charity line was practised through welfare rights.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2013 *"The good of an individual is contained in the good of all.' What do you understand by this statement? How can this principle be implemented in public life?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same moral root: others' suffering is our concern, not our generosity.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W8 Fri Q4 *"Most welfare in India is delivered as discretionary schemes a government can expand or withdraw at will, while only a few benefits are legal entitlements. To what extent should welfare in India be founded on justiciable rights?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same distinction at state level: is help a favour the giver controls, or a duty the sufferer can claim? Our question argued it for welfare. This one asks it of the individual.

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q5 *"In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness, in their welfare his welfare." (Kautilya). What does this quotation mean to you in the present context?"*

HOW IT CONNECTS Kautilya's version: the strong owe the weak their welfare as duty, not kindness.

Q7 · 20 MARKS

Lata, a mother of two, was admitted for acute abdominal pain. During a laparoscopy under general anesthesia, Dr. Mansi's team found a possibly malignant tumor in her uterus. Instead of a biopsy, Dr. Mansi removed the uterus with the written consent of Lata's sister-in-law Sujatha. Lata, informed the next day, felt betrayed and went to court. (a) Discuss the ethical issues involved. (b) Discuss the moral conduct of the doctor.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The doctor meant well and may have saved a second surgery. But she removed an organ without the patient's own consent. The case asks whose body, whose choice.

IN SHORT Consent and good intention, the case's two poles, were both in our bank.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"Sneha is a Senior Manager working for a big reputed hospital chain in a mid-sized city."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The medical-ethics case lane, used two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q2 *"Examine the significance of privacy and informed consent as ethical values in a digital welfare state."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Informed consent as a value was our theory question. Its rule decides this case: consent belongs to the patient, and no relative's signature replaces it when the patient can be waited for.

DAW 2026 · W6 Fri Q5 *"Dr. Meera Iyer is the medical superintendent of a district government hospital during a severe seasonal outbreak of viral fever that has filled the wards."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our medical case trained the same judgement: a doctor's good intent measured against the patient's rights. Note for part (b): paternalism and beneficence, the theory asked at Q4(a) of this very paper, are the tools to grade Dr. Mansi.

Q8 · 20 MARKS

Ravi, an SP, installed AI-enabled predictive policing that captures biometric data from crowds. It flagged an immigrant, low-income neighbourhood; policing improved, but community leaders allege the system is biased, built on faulty historical data, and that surveillance without residents' knowledge has bred tension. (a) What are the ethical issues, including biases, in AI and data-driven policing? (b) In Ravi's role, discuss the alternatives and justify the action that best combines ethics and compliance.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The machine works, order improved, and a whole community feels watched and pre-judged. The case asks whether policing by algorithm can be fair.

IN SHORT The algorithm-authority rule and the data-misuse case were both ours.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *"The application of Artificial Intelligence as a dependable source of input for administrative rational decision-making is a debatable issue."*

HOW IT CONNECTS AI in official decisions, asked directly, two years ago.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q11 *"Critically analyse, in the present context of AI-assisted administration, the claim that where a citizen's benefit or liberty is at stake, an algorithm must never be the final authority."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question is the case's core rule: liberty is at stake in policing, so the algorithm may point but never decide. Old biased data producing biased policing is exactly why.

DAW 2026 · W6 Sat Q4 *"Imran Qureshi heads the technology unit of a state welfare department that holds a large database of beneficiaries, including their Aadhaar-linked details, collected to deliver a food subsidy."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our data case trained the other half: people's data used beyond what they knew or agreed to. Ravi's residents did not even know their data was taken.

Q9 · 20 MARKS

Seema, an honest senior bureaucrat, is DC of Surinder Nagar, where a tout network working through subordinate officials is selectively clearing land-use applications for bribes. Employees are scared, the backlog grows, the public suffers. She must break the network without halting daily administration. (a) What are the ethical issues? (b) Discuss her options, identify the recommended option and justify it.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Corruption has become a system, and fear keeps it running. The case asks how to clean an office without stopping its work.

IN SHORT The bribery-for-clearance case and the why-institutions-fail question were both ours.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2015 *“Today we find that in spite of various measures like prescribing codes of conduct, setting up vigilance cells/commissions, RTI, active media, and strengthening of legal mechanisms...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Why corruption survives all the machinery, asked directly.

2022 *“Whistleblower, who reports corruption and illegal activities, wrongdoing, and misconduct to the concerned authorities, runs the risk of being exposed to grave danger, physical harm...”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The fear that keeps honest staff silent, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

DAW 2026 · W6 Sat Q5 *“Deepak Sharma, a section officer who clears building-plan approvals, has on his desk an application from a small businessman, Mahesh, whose papers are entirely in order and who is legally entitled to approval.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case is the same racket seen from one desk: money to move lawful files. Seema sees it from the top, as a network.

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q12 *“Examine why well-designed anti-corruption institutions often underdeliver in practice.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our theory question is her part (b): why a loud crackdown can fail, and why steady, protected, systemic cleaning works better. The recommended path: quiet evidence first, protect the honest, fix the process so touts have nothing to sell.

Q10 · 20 MARKS

Vikas, DC of remote Nainipura, runs the PDS for the poorest. Biometric checks meant to stop leakages keep failing for growing children, manual labourers and senior citizens, worse when WiFi is slow; distributors then decide by personal discretion. Strict rules ensure fiscal probity but hurt the poorest and may touch their Article 21 rights. (a) What options does Vikas have, and how should he balance fiscal probity with empathy? (b) Discuss the ethics of using technology as a gatekeeper for welfare schemes.

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT The machine that was meant to stop theft is now turning away the very people the scheme feeds. The case asks what the officer owes first: the ledger or the hungry.

IN SHORT This case was in our banks, nearly line for line.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2022 “Apart from intellectual competency and moral qualities, empathy and compassion are some of the other vital attributes...”

HOW IT CONNECTS Empathy as the officer's needed quality, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCKIAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q18 “You are the district officer in charge of a fully digitised welfare scheme in which eligibility for benefits is decided automatically by Aadhaar-linked software, with little human checking in between.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Our case is this case: the software auto-rejecting the genuinely poor over small mismatches, and the officer deciding between the system and the person. Even the fix is shared: keep the technology, add a human door for those it fails.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q13 “In the drive to meet delivery targets, a welfare administration can quietly reduce the poorest to numbers on a dashboard rather than persons at a counter.”

HOW IT CONNECTS Part (b) was our theory question: technology as gatekeeper, and the dignity it can cost. From our GS3 bank, the same pensioner logic: the fingerprints fail, the person is real.

Q11 · 20 MARKS

Rajan is the new DM of Rajapuram, a border district where ethnic conflict between the Jhara and Biru communities has killed many. The rivalry has seeped into the local administration and police; both communities distrust the government. A neighbouring country could exploit the unrest. Rajan favours a controlled approach: reopen the highway for food and medicines, consider CRPF support. (a) Discuss the ethical issues. (b) What are his options, and which protects his non-partisan image without compromising ethics?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT Two communities at war, an administration seen as taking sides, and a border that makes every mistake dangerous. The case asks how an officer stays fair and is seen to be fair.

IN SHORT Neutrality under communal fire was practised across our banks.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2024 *“With the summer heat being exceptionally severe this year, the district has been facing severe water shortage.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS The DM-under-crisis case lane, used recently.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q9 *“Differentiate between impartiality and non-partisanship in public service, with suitable examples.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Part (b)'s exact vocabulary was our theory question: being fair, and being seen to belong to no side. Rajan's answer turns on both.

Simulator GS4 · Set B · Q19 *“Devika is the Divisional Commissioner of a border district. Across the border, in a strictly neighbouring country, fighting has driven civilians from their homes.”*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our border case trained the same nerves: humanity first, security always, and a hostile neighbour watching. Rajan's highway-first instinct, food and medicine before force, is the same order of steps.

Q12 · 20 MARKS

Ajit heads Weapon Sales in the Ministry of Defence Production. Production limits mean he can sell to only one of two developing countries: A, outside all alliances, needing arms against a troublesome neighbour, seeking a long-term loan; or B, alliance-backed, military-first at its people's cost, not an NPT signatory, supporter of guerrilla forces abroad, ready with advance payment. (a) Discuss his options and which he should choose and why. (b) How can he balance the nation's economic and strategic interests with ethical considerations?

WHAT THIS QUESTION IS ABOUT One buyer needs protection. The other feeds conflict. The money argues one way, the conscience another. The case asks what a nation's sale says about the nation.

IN SHORT Ethics against strategic interest, this paper's own 5(b), turned into a case.

UPSC ASKED THIS BEFORE

2020 *"The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The exact frame: power and profit tamed by moral duty, asked in the IR context.

2017 *"Strength, peace and security are considered to be the pillars of international relations. Elucidate."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Ethics among nations, asked directly.

WE PRACTISED THIS AT UNLOCK IAS

Simulator GS4 · Set A · Q1 *"A rising power is no longer merely a claimant in global governance but increasingly a maker of its rules. As its capacity grows, it begins to set the terms that weaker nations must live by..."*

HOW IT CONNECTS Our question asked what a powerful seller owes the weaker world. Ajit's desk is where that question becomes real: country A defends itself, country B arms conflict. The ethical sale is also the strategic one, a stable, grateful partner over quick money.

DAW 2026 · W7 Mon Q2 *"India presents itself as the voice of the Global South, yet as it grows richer its interests on carbon, trade and debt part ways with the poorest nations."*

HOW IT CONNECTS The same test of what kind of power India wants to be. From our IR bank. The argument carries straight into part (b).

FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Mains is never 'moderate' or 'tough' or 'easy'. Those words belong to next-day reviews, not to this exam.

Year after year, Mains is theme repetition. This year said it loudly. Even then, it is not simple. The marks go to those who have internalised the basic content, practised answer writing enough, and walked in with self-belief.

And remember one thing about the cutoff: it is decided by relative performance. Everyone in that hall faced the same paper you did. If it felt hard, it felt hard to everyone. Your preparation decides where you stand, not the paper's mood. So let no one frighten you about it. Whenever fear spreads, someone appears selling a shortcut. You do not need a shortcut. You need the basics, practice, and patience.

If these three lines settle in early, the road becomes calm:

PYQs are the key.

Answer writing is the art.

Relative performance decides the outcome.

We wish you the very best for your result, and for everything ahead.

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With best wishes,

Team UnlockIAS