

WHERE THIS PAPER CAME FROM

Mains 2026 · General Studies I

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	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