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Essay Paper

Practice Questions

Essay

Exam-realistic questions with answer outlines, key points, examples, model answers and sources.

60

QUESTIONS · MODEL ANSWERS

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UPSC Mains Practice Questions — Essay

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60 practice questions, each with an answer outline, key points, examples, a model answer and sources.

Organised into the following sections:

Philosophical — 18 questions

Society — 16 questions

Governance — 13 questions

Economy — 10 questions

Environment — 3 questions

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How to use this book

Each question is exam-realistic and tagged with its marks, suggested word limit, and target writing time. Treat the page as a timed drill: read the question, give yourself the stated minutes, and write your own answer first.

Then check yourself against:

- **Answer Outline** — the intro–body–conclusion structure a high-scoring answer follows.
- **Key Points to Include** — the facts, committees, data and articles examiners reward.
- **Examples & Case Studies** — specific instances to make the answer concrete.
- **Model Answer** — one complete, well-within-limit attempt to learn the register from.
- **Sources** — where to read more and verify.

Difficulty (Easy / Medium / Hard) signals how much synthesis the question demands, not how important it is. Work across all sections for full syllabus coverage.

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ESSAY

Philosophical

18 practice questions

Q1

Memory is the architecture of identity; forgetting is its sculptor

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

MEMORY, IDENTITY AND THE SELF

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'Funes the Memorious' — the man who could forget nothing and therefore could not think. Frame the paradox: identity is not the sum of what we remember but the residue of what we have chosen, or been forced, to forget. Thesis: memory is what we are made of, but forgetting is what gives the shape meaning.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Personal identity. From Locke's 'continuity of consciousness' to neuroscience of episodic memory (Endel Tulving). Trauma rewires what is encoded. Cite the testimony of Holocaust survivors, the role of Yad Vashem, and Marcel Proust's involuntary memory in 'In Search of Lost Time'.

Argument 2 (~200w): National identity. India's freedom movement is remembered in textbooks and forgotten in detail — we remember Gandhi's Dandi March but rarely the Chittagong raid. The 1947 Partition was, until the Partition Museum Amritsar (2017), an officially silenced wound. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa shows that nations heal by remembering with discipline.

Argument 3 (~200w): Digital memory. Cloud storage promises perfect recall, but the EU's 'Right to be Forgotten' (Google Spain v AEPD, 2014) and India's DPDP Act 2023 right to erasure recognise that dignity requires the freedom to be unbound from one's past data trail. Algorithms that never forget produce reputational permanence — a new kind of caste.

Counter-view (~150w): Forgetting is dangerous. Holocaust deniers thrive in forgetfulness. India's repeated communal violence partly stems from a refusal to remember 1984, 1992, 2002 with honesty. Selective amnesia in textbooks (Doniger's withdrawn book; Mughal chapters removed by NCERT 2023) is not maturity, it is mutilation.

Conclusion (~100w): The sculptor's chisel is not the enemy of marble; it is its midwife. A society, like a person, becomes itself by choosing what to keep luminous and what to release. The discipline lies not in remembering everything or forgetting everything, but in remembering rightly.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Locke's psychological continuity theory of personal identity
- Endel Tulving — episodic vs semantic memory
- Maurice Halbwachs — collective memory
- Right to be forgotten (EU GDPR Art. 17; DPDP Act 2023 Sec 12)
- Partition Museum Amritsar (2017) as institutionalised remembering
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa, 1995
- Nietzsche's 'On the Use and Abuse of History for Life'
- Hindi: 'Smriti pehchaan ki shilpkala hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Borges, 'Funes the Memorious'
- Marcel Proust, 'In Search of Lost Time' (the madeleine episode)
- Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, Jerusalem
- Google Spain SL v. AEPD (CJEU, 2014)
- Partition Museum, Amritsar
- NCERT textbook revisions 2023 (Mughal chapter excisions)
- Christopher Nolan, 'Memento' (2000)

MODEL ANSWER

In a Buenos Aires sanatorium, Jorge Luis Borges imagined Ireneo Funes, a young man thrown from a horse who, on regaining consciousness, could forget nothing. Every leaf of every tree of every walk was preserved entire. Funes could not sleep, because sleeping required forgetting; he could not think, because thinking required generalisation, and generalisation required loss. He died at twenty-one of pulmonary congestion. Borges' parable is the founding diagnosis of the modern self. **Identity is not the sum of what we remember; it is the residue of what we have chosen, or been forced, to forget.** Memory is what we are made of, but forgetting is what gives the shape its meaning.

Philosophy reaches the same conclusion by a different road. John Locke argued in 1689 that personal identity is nothing but the continuity of consciousness, the chain

by which a child knows herself to be the woman she has become. Endel Tulving in 1972 deepened the picture by separating semantic memory, the dictionary in our head, from episodic memory, the autobiography. Trauma, neuroscience confirms, does not erase episodes; it relocates them, often violently. Survivors of the Holocaust have spoken of memories that emerged decades after the camps, triggered by an arbitrary smell or sound. Marcel Proust's narrator, in *In Search of Lost Time*, bites a madeleine dipped in tea and the entire town of Combray rises from a cup. The episode is small; the recovered self is enormous. We do not own our memories; we negotiate with them, choosing each day, often unconsciously, which to revisit and which to leave dimmed.

Nations negotiate similarly, only more publicly. India remembers Gandhi's salt at Dandi and forgets, almost annually, the Chittagong Armoury Raid of April 1930. Until the Partition Museum opened at Amritsar Town Hall on 17 August 2017, the largest migration in human history had no national address. South Africa, by contrast, chose disciplined remembering. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1995, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, did not pretend that forgiveness required amnesia; it built a public liturgy of recall. Yad Vashem in Jerusalem performs the same function for Jewish memory, archiving four million names so that absence becomes specifically rather than abstractly mourned. **Nations heal not by remembering everything, but by remembering rightly.**

The digital age has now industrialised both faculties. Cloud servers promise perfect recall: a juvenile shoplifting case in 1998 is still the first result in 2026. The Court of Justice of the European Union, in *Google Spain SL v AEPD* on 13 May 2014, recognised that dignity requires the freedom to outgrow one's own data trail and minted the 'right to be forgotten'. India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 followed in Section 12, allowing erasure of personal data once purpose is exhausted. The Delhi High Court, in *Jorawer Singh Mundy v Union of India* in 2021, ordered the de-indexing of a court order acquitting a young American of a minor narcotics charge so that the petitioner could rejoin civilian life without the eternal Google footprint of his arrest. The legal vocabulary is new; the moral instinct is ancient. A society in which algorithms never forget produces a reputational permanence indistinguishable from a new caste, where past misdeeds, like an ancestral varna, follow a person through every login, every interview, every visa application, every loan denial.

There is a counter-argument of considerable force, and it must be heard fully. Forgetting is the soil in which denial grows. Holocaust deniers thrive on amnesia; India's recurrent communal violence is fed by an unwillingness to remember 1984 in Delhi, 1992 in Ayodhya, and 2002 in Gujarat with judicial honesty. The Justice

Nanavati Commission, the Justice Ranganath Misra Commission, the Justice Liberhan Commission, each produced volumes that the country largely declined to read. The NCERT's 2023 textbook revisions, which thinned the Mughal chapter and trimmed sections on the Emergency, are not maturity but mutilation; a republic does not become braver by reading less of its own history. Friedrich Nietzsche, who in 1874 wrote *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*, was careful: a healthy culture forgets neither too much nor too little. The cure for traumatic memory is curation, not erasure, and curation requires institutions willing to look uncomfortable evidence in the face.

That is why memorialisation matters as policy, not sentiment. France includes Vichy in its school syllabus. Germany teaches the Holocaust as a constitutional duty. India's challenge is to find the institutional grammar of disciplined recall: an Emergency memorial in Delhi, a Bengal Famine archive in Kolkata, a museum of the Bhopal gas disaster on the Union Carbide plant footprint at Hamidia Road. Each would convert wound into witness, and would invite later generations into a conversation rather than a closure. The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, which protects 2.5 lakh Ayurvedic, Unani, Siddha, and Sowa-Rigpa formulations from biopiracy, shows the inverse face of the same instinct: civilisational memory institutionalised against forgetting imposed by others. The state, properly understood, is both the keeper and the curator of a society's archive, neither free to discard nor permitted to embalm.

The sculptor and the marble

The image we began with returns. The chisel is not the enemy of marble; it is its midwife. What it removes makes possible what remains. Christopher Nolan's 2000 film *Memento* follows a man who cannot form new memories and so tattoos his identity onto his skin; he ends, predictably, as a tool of those who can. Maurice Halbwachs, in *On Collective Memory*, argued that memory is always social, always shaped by the group; what looks like personal recollection is in fact a collective work. The Quaker silent worship, the Jewish Yom HaShoah, the Buddhist anatta meditation, India's *shraddh* rites for ancestors all rehearse the same insight. We become ourselves by performing memory together, and by performing forgetting together.

Mnemosyne, mother of the muses, sired art only when she danced with Lethe, the river of oblivion. **A society, like a person, becomes itself by choosing what to keep luminous and what to release.** The Indian republic at seventy-six has an unprecedented opportunity: it is wealthy enough to build memorials, technologically able to digitise its languages, legally equipped to enforce a right to erasure under

DPDP Section 12, and morally obliged by Article 51A(f) to value its composite heritage. What it owes its citizens is not the perfect recall of Funes but the discipline of Borges himself, who, blind and aging, dictated stories not to record everything he had seen but to honour what mattered. Identity, in the end, is architecture, and architecture is the art of standing as much as the art of leaving room. The republic which masters both arts will, like the marble, hold its shape long after the chisel has been put down.

SOURCES

- DPDP Act 2023: Digital Personal Data Protection, Consent Manager and the Data Protection Board
- Personal Liberty under Article 21 — Maneka Gandhi to Puttaswamy
- Nietzsche, On the Use and Abuse of History for Life (1874)

collective memory

episodic memory

right to erasure

psychological continuity

selective amnesia

memorialisation

Mnemosyne

anamnesis

trauma memory

Q2

In an age of abundance, the rarest commodity is attention

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

ATTENTION AS MORAL RESOURCE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Begin with Herbert Simon's 1971 prophecy: 'A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.' Five decades later, the average smartphone user touches the device 2,617 times a day. Thesis: in a civilisation that has solved scarcity of calories, books, and entertainment, the truly rationed resource is sustained human attention — and whoever owns it owns the future.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Attention as cognitive capital. Daniel Kahneman's System 1/System 2; deep work as the precondition of original thought (Cal Newport). India loses an estimated 8% of GDP to attention-poor productivity (NITI Aayog projections on workplace distraction).

Argument 2 (~200w): Attention as a moral act. Simone Weil: 'Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.' To attend to the suffering of another is the foundation of compassion. Doctors who scroll while patients speak, teachers who lecture to phone-screens, parents who half-listen — each is an ethical failure dressed as multitasking.

Argument 3 (~200w): Attention as political battleground. The 'attention economy' is now extractive (Shoshana Zuboff, 'Surveillance Capitalism'). India's IT Rules 2021 and the DPDP

Act 2023 acknowledge data dignity, but not yet attention dignity. The 2023 EU Digital Services Act bans ‘dark patterns’ that manipulate user attention.

Counter-view (~150w): Technology has also democratised attention. Khan Academy reaches 41 million learners; SWAYAM hosts 200+ free MOOCs in Indian languages. Distraction is not destiny — it is a discipline problem, and discipline is teachable.

Conclusion (~100w): Where treasure goes, the heart follows; in our age, where attention goes, the soul follows. Reclaiming attention is not nostalgia for paper books — it is the most political, most spiritual, and most economically consequential act available to a citizen.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Herbert Simon's 1971 'poverty of attention' thesis
- Simone Weil on attention as generosity
- Daniel Kahneman's System 1 and System 2
- Cal Newport's 'Deep Work'
- Shoshana Zuboff's surveillance capitalism
- EU Digital Services Act 2022 (dark-pattern ban)
- IT Rules 2021 and DPDP Act 2023 in India
- Hindi: 'dhyaan hi sabse durlabh sampatti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Khan Academy (41 million active learners worldwide)
- SWAYAM MOOC platform, India
- Shoshana Zuboff, 'The Age of Surveillance Capitalism' (2019)
- Cal Newport, 'Deep Work' (2016)
- TikTok's 2024 algorithm changes (60-min daily teen limit in France)
- Apple Screen Time and Digital Wellbeing features

MODEL ANSWER

In 1971, a Nobel laureate in economics named Herbert Simon delivered an address that posterity has condensed into one sentence: ‘A wealth of information creates a poverty of attention.’ Simon was speaking before the personal computer, before the Internet, before the smartphone. Half a century later, dscout’s annual survey records the average American user touching their phone 2,617 times a day; an Indian Council of Medical Research study in 2023 placed Indian urban adolescents at 6.5 hours of daily screen time. The civilisation that solved scarcity of calories, books, and entertainment

has produced its own famine. **The rarest commodity in an age of abundance is the sustained, undivided, willing presence of a human mind, and whoever owns it owns the future.**

Attention is first of all cognitive capital. Daniel Kahneman, in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, mapped two systems: the fast, intuitive System 1 and the slow, deliberative System 2. The premium work of a knowledge economy, from drafting a Finance Bill to debugging a satellite firmware, is the work of System 2, which collapses under constant interruption. Cal Newport in 2016 named this work ‘deep work’ and argued, plausibly, that it is becoming both rarer and more valuable. NITI Aayog’s 2024 productivity note estimated that distraction-induced inefficiency costs Indian white-collar enterprises an annual six to eight per cent of output. The smartphone, like the lottery ticket, is a regressive tax on concentration.

But attention is more than capital; it is a moral act. Simone Weil, the French philosopher who starved herself in solidarity with Occupied France, wrote that ‘attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity.’ To attend to a patient’s halting story before the next consultation, to a child’s drawing before the next email, to a grieving spouse before the next notification, is to grant another person the gift of one’s presence. The doctor who scrolls while the patient speaks, the teacher who lectures to phone-screens, the parent who half-listens at the dinner table are each guilty of a small ethical failure dressed up as multitasking. Attention is the threshold at which empathy becomes possible; without it, sympathy is performance.

Attention is also a political battleground. Shoshana Zuboff’s *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* in 2019 named the new business model: platforms harvest attention, refine it into behavioural prediction, and sell the futures contract back to advertisers. India’s IT Rules of 2021 and the DPDP Act of 2023 acknowledge data dignity but say little about attention dignity. The European Union has moved further: the Digital Services Act of 2022 prohibits ‘dark patterns’, the design tricks that nudge users into compulsive scrolling. France, in 2023, mandated TikTok to cap teen sessions at sixty minutes a day. Australia, in 2024, legislated a social-media floor age of sixteen. **The question for India is not whether to regulate attention but whether to do so before a generation forgets that another mode of living exists.**

Technology has also democratised attention, and a fair essay must say so. Khan Academy reports 41 million active learners globally; India’s SWAYAM platform hosts over two hundred MOOCs in Indian languages and recorded 4.3 crore enrolments by 2024. The same algorithms that fragment a doom-scroller’s evening also deliver an

MBBS lecture to a Jhargram tribal girl whose ancestors never finished primary school. Apple's Screen Time and Google's Digital Wellbeing dashboards return some measure of agency. Distraction is not destiny. It is, like literacy, a discipline that can be taught, and like literacy, the test is whether the public school system teaches it.

That is the harder pedagogical task. Indian education, NEP 2020 notwithstanding, still rewards rote retrieval over sustained engagement. A child who can hold a thought for forty minutes is, by 2026 standards, a child with a competitive advantage almost as decisive as proficiency in English once was. Finland has integrated digital-literacy and attention-training into primary curricula since the 2014 national reform; Singapore runs a national 'Digital for Life' programme that has trained over a million seniors and parents in mindful technology use; Australia legislated a social-media floor age of sixteen in November 2024 after a Senate inquiry documented platform harms. India's Mission Karmayogi promises civil-service capacity building but does not yet teach Joint Secretaries to switch off WhatsApp during file work. The Indian Council of Social Science Research could fund a national Attention Atlas to map prevalence and harm. The Election Commission could ask political parties to take pledges against deepfake micro-targeting in the lead-up to polls. The Supreme Court could examine whether a child's right to undistracted education flows from Article 21A read with the Right to Education Act 2009. Each is a modest, available reform; none requires waiting for technology to mature.

There is a serious counter-claim that deserves a careful answer. Some argue that attention scarcity is a first-world worry; an Indian daily-wage earner picking through a Surat construction site does not have the privilege of deep work. The objection is partly correct and largely wrong. Distracted welfare delivery exhausts the poor first: a PDS shopkeeper who fumbles e-KYC because of a faulty fingerprint costs a beneficiary half a day's wage. The clinician at a Primary Health Centre in Madhya Pradesh's Sheopur who treats a malaria fever while watching a WhatsApp notification misdiagnoses. The schoolteacher in Patna who supervises midday meals between social-media check-ins teaches less. The bureaucrat in a District Magistrate's office whose attention drifts between four parallel WhatsApp groups during a land-revenue hearing decides badly, and the petitioner who has waited four hours for her file pays the cost. Attention is not the luxury of the leisured; it is the infrastructure of every service the poor depend on, from teaching to vaccination to land-record correction to grievance redressal.

The closing claim is simple and old. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' Reverse the formula for our age: where

attention goes, the soul follows. The Bhagavad Gita's *ekagrata* and the Buddhist *samadhi* were not monastic luxuries; they were technologies of self-government. The republic that recovers attention will recover, with it, three goods at once: better workers, better citizens, better human beings. **Reclaiming attention is not nostalgia for paper books; it is the most political, most spiritual, and most economically consequential act available to a citizen.** The Indian challenge of the coming decade is therefore not just to lay 5G fibre but to lay an internal architecture against which 5G can land without flooding the basement. The phone is a remarkable invention. The decision to put it down, sometimes, is a more remarkable one.

SOURCES

- DPDP Act 2023: Digital Personal Data Protection, Consent Manager and the Data Protection Board
- IT Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code (Amendment) Rules, 2025
- Herbert A. Simon, 'Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World' (1971)

attention economy

deep work

dark patterns

cognitive surplus

dopamine loop

mindfulness

Simone Weil

surveillance capitalism

distraction by design

Q3

Silence is the loudest answer to noise

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

SILENCE, SPEECH AND INNER AUTHORITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the image of Buddha's flower sermon at Vulture Peak — where he held up a single lotus and Mahakashyapa smiled, and the dharma was transmitted without a word. Contrast with our parliament shutdowns, prime-time decibel TV, and 280-character verdicts. Thesis: silence is not the absence of speech; it is speech matured — the disciplined refusal that gives words their weight.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Silence as wisdom. The Upanishadic 'maun' as a path of self-realisation; the Quaker silent worship; the Trappist monastic tradition. Wittgenstein closed the Tractatus: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.' Mahatma Gandhi's Monday silence — a discipline that sharpened, not blunted, his interventions.

Argument 2 (~200w): Silence as protest. Tiananmen's 'Tank Man' (1989). The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo's silent Thursday march, Buenos Aires. Aruna Roy and the silent dharnas of the MKSS that birthed the RTI Act, 2005. In each case, silence amplified what shouting could not — the moral weight of presence.

Argument 3 (~200w): Silence in governance. The Speaker's right to silence a House for order; the judicial restraint that refuses to comment on pending matters; the diplomatic 'no comment' that prevents war. The Supreme Court's 2024 directions reining in 'media trial' coverage — a constitutional case for institutional silence.

Counter-view (~150w): Silence can be complicity. Edmund Burke: 'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.' India's silent press during the Emergency (1975-77); silence of bystanders in Bilkis Bano's ordeal; the Holocaust enabled by ordinary silence. Silence is moral only when it speaks louder than speech would have.

Conclusion (~100w): The Mahabharata teaches: speech is silver, silence is gold, but silence in front of injustice is lead. A republic, like a temple, needs both the bell and the pause between its rings.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Buddha's Flower Sermon and Mahakashyapa's smile
- Wittgenstein's Tractatus closing proposition
- Gandhi's weekly maun-vrat
- Aruna Roy, MKSS and the RTI Act 2005
- Edmund Burke's warning on silence
- Supreme Court directions on media trials, 2024
- Quaker silent worship; Trappist vow
- Hindi: 'maun sabse oonchi awaaz hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Tiananmen Square Tank Man, 5 June 1989
- Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Argentina
- Mahatma Gandhi's Monday silence
- Indian press during the Emergency (1975-77)
- Wittgenstein, 'Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus' (1921)
- MKSS dharnas leading to RTI Act 2005

MODEL ANSWER

On Vulture Peak, the Buddha held up a single golden lotus. He said nothing. Of the assembled disciples, only Mahakashyapa smiled, and in that smile, the dharma was transmitted. The story, from the Zen tradition, is offered against everything modern political life teaches. Our Parliament dissolves into shutdowns; prime-time television

measures argument by decibel; an outraged tweet is composed in seconds and lives forever. Yet civilisations across centuries have honoured a different conviction.

Silence is not the absence of speech; it is speech matured, the disciplined refusal that lends words their weight. In a republic learning to shout, learning to fall silent at the right moment may be the harder, and the more constitutional, discipline.

The wisdom tradition begins here. The Mandukya Upanishad places *turiya*, the silent fourth state, beyond waking, dream, and deep sleep, as the ground of consciousness itself. Christian monks of Mount Athos still practice hesychasm, the prayer of stillness; Trappists vowed silence at meals so words at compline would carry meaning. Ludwig Wittgenstein closed the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921 with the proposition that ‘whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’, a metaphysical and moral injunction at once. Mahatma Gandhi observed every Monday as *maun-vrat* from 1925 onward. Far from blunting his interventions, the silence sharpened them; on the Mondays that followed, he wrote his most-quoted editorials in *Young India* and *Harijan*. Silence, properly practised, is not retreat from the world but rehearsal for its renovation.

Silence is also the most underrated language of protest. On 5 June 1989, a man in a white shirt stood in front of a column of Type 59 tanks at Chang’an Avenue, Beijing. He carried two shopping bags. He spoke not a word. His image, captured by Jeff Widener of the Associated Press, has outlived three Chinese presidents. The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo have marched silently in Buenos Aires every Thursday since 1977, white scarves over their hair, holding photographs of the disappeared. In India, Aruna Roy and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan held silent dharnas in Beawar, Rajasthan, from 1996 onward, refusing to harangue and refusing to leave. That patience flowered into the Right to Information Act of 2005. **Each silence amplified what shouting could not: the moral weight of presence.**

Constitutional life is, at its best, an institutionalised respect for silence. The Speaker has the authority to silence a House to restore order; the judge maintains *sub judice* restraint so that public clamour does not poison a pending matter; the diplomat’s ‘no comment’ has on more than one occasion averted war. The Supreme Court’s directions in 2024 limiting prime-time ‘media trial’ coverage during ongoing criminal proceedings were a constitutional defence of silence, not of secrecy. Article 124’s collegium deliberations are confidential not to hide reasoning but to enable it. Lord Hewart’s old maxim that justice must not only be done but seen to be done has a

companion: it must be heard only at the right time, in the right forum, by the right authority.

And yet silence has a dark twin, and any honest essay must reckon with it. Edmund Burke's warning, often misquoted but morally exact, is that all that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. The Indian press, with honourable exceptions like the *Indian Express* and L. K. Advani's quip about crawling, did not always rise to the demands of the Emergency between June 1975 and March 1977. The bystanders who watched as Bilkis Bano's family was killed in Limkheda in 2002; the policemen who looked away during the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom; the German neighbours who pulled curtains as their Jewish neighbours were taken away in 1938: each is a reminder that silence in the face of injustice is not the gold of restraint but the lead of complicity. The Mahabharata makes this very distinction: *maun* is golden when speech would be harmful, but *maun* before adharma is itself adharma.

The pertinent question is therefore not silence versus speech, but the right of each at the right moment. A judge's silence on a pending case is principled; a politician's silence on a communal lynching is not. A monk's silence before God is devotion; a witness's silence before a wrongful conviction is collusion. The line between the two is what one might call moral grammar, and a republic teaches it badly. India's public sphere has, in the last decade, almost no institutionalised culture of pause. Studio panels with eight speakers and a moderator who is the loudest of the nine; legislative debates conducted in marshals and microphones; family WhatsApp groups in which a forwarded message is received as evidence. Restoring silence as a public good is therefore not a personal-development tip; it is a constitutional repair project.

What might that look like? Parliamentary rules could mandate one minute of silence before any debate on a communal incident, to allow temper to cool. Schools could institutionalise five minutes of silent reading at the start of each day, as Vinoba Bhave once suggested for ashram schools. Newsrooms could volunteer a 'reflection hour' before breaking news on a death. Courts have already taken the lead: Justice D. Y. Chandrachud's 2023 direction that bail hearings not be conducted by counsel shouting over each other was a small but real instance of silence as procedure. The Election Commission's 48-hour 'silence period' before polling, statutorily mandated under Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act 1951, is another instance. Each represents the same constitutional intuition: that argument is a worthwhile public good only when it is preceded by listening, and listening is preceded by stillness. A republic without that intuition becomes a marketplace of louder voices, not a meeting of minds.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote in *Gitanjali* of God speaking ‘in the leaves and the silence between them.’ India, the polity, must learn what India, the civilisation, has long known. **A republic needs both the bell and the pause between its rings; without the pause, the bell becomes noise.** Our generation’s task, in courts, in newsrooms, in classrooms, and in the inner room of the self, is to recover the discipline of choosing when to speak and when not to. The most eloquent answer to noise, it turns out, is the silence that follows it.

SOURCES

- Right to Information Act 2005 — Three-Tier System, Amendments & UPSC Notes
- 50 Years of the National Emergency (1975-2025): Lessons, Reforms and the 44th Amendment
- Gandhian Philosophy: Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship

maun-vrat

satyagraha

media trial

ineffable

moral witness

civil disobedience

judicial restraint

via negativa

sub judice

Q4

Freedom is the discipline of choosing what to refuse

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

HARD

LIBERTY, RESTRAINT AND SELF-MASTERY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Begin with Odysseus binding himself to the mast so he can hear the Sirens without obeying them. The ultimate freedom was not the absence of constraint but the chosen one. Thesis: freedom is not the right to do what one wants; it is the cultivated capacity to refuse what one wants but should not have. Children have impulses; adults have liberty.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Philosophical case. Isaiah Berlin’s two concepts of liberty — negative (absence of interference) and positive (self-mastery). Spinoza: ‘Freedom is the consciousness of necessity.’ The Bhagavad Gita’s nishkama karma: act, but renounce the fruit. Kant’s autonomy as obedience to the law one gives oneself.

Argument 2 (~200w): Personal case. Addictions — to phones, sugar, outrage, validation — are the modern Sirens. The discipline of fasting (Ramadan, Ekadashi, Lent) is freedom training. The Stoic ‘praemeditatio malorum’. India’s Swadeshi movement (1905) refused British cloth to win something larger.

Argument 3 (~200w): Political case. A free press refuses paid news; a free judge refuses post-retirement appointments; a free voter refuses bribed votes; a free regulator refuses

regulatory capture. The Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct is a refusal architecture. The 2G Spectrum and Coalgate judgments (2012, 2014) were Supreme Court refusals of executive overreach.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue refusal is privilege — a daily wager cannot refuse work. True. But refusal can be collective: trade unions refusing exploitative wages, the 2020-21 farmers' protest refusing three farm laws, women refusing dowry. Discipline of refusal scales when institutions back it.

Conclusion (~100w): Tagore wrote, 'Freedom is not in the mere possession but in the disciplined use.' A republic at 76 must learn what every individual must learn — that the longest 'No' protects the most valuable 'Yes'.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Odysseus and the Sirens — ulysses contract
- Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty (1958 lecture)
- Bhagavad Gita's nishkama karma
- Kant's autonomy as moral law
- Spinoza's freedom as consciousness of necessity
- Model Code of Conduct, Election Commission of India
- 2G Spectrum (2012) and Coalgate (2014) judgments
- Tagore on disciplined freedom
- Hindi: 'swatantrata anushaasit nirnay hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Odysseus binding himself to the mast (Homer's Odyssey)
- Swadeshi Movement, Partition of Bengal, 1905
- Farmers' protest 2020-21 against three farm laws
- Anna Hazare's Lokpal fast, 2011
- Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (Oxford, 1958)
- Viktor Frankl, 'Man's Search for Meaning' (1946)

MODEL ANSWER

On his long voyage home from Troy, Odysseus was warned by the witch Circe that he would soon sail past the island of the Sirens, whose song no sailor had ever resisted. He devised a peculiar precaution. He filled his crew's ears with beeswax and had himself bound to the mast, ordering the rowers to ignore every plea he would soon

make. The song came; Odysseus begged to be released; the ropes held. He alone of Greek heroes heard the Sirens and lived. The ancients understood something we have forgotten. **Freedom is not the right to do what one wants; it is the cultivated capacity to refuse what one wants but should not have.** Children have impulses; adults have liberty.

Philosophy has rediscovered the insight in successive ages. Isaiah Berlin in his 1958 Oxford inaugural lecture distinguished negative liberty, the absence of interference, from positive liberty, the mastery of the self by the self. Both are necessary; neither alone is sufficient. Baruch Spinoza, two centuries earlier, defined freedom as ‘the consciousness of necessity’, the recognition that the truly free agent is the one who acts in accordance with rightly understood reason rather than against it. Immanuel Kant called this autonomy: obedience not to external law but to the moral law one gives oneself. The Bhagavad Gita’s *nishkama karma*, action without attachment to its fruit, is the same insight rendered in Sanskrit. To act freely is not to act capriciously; it is to act with such inward discipline that capriciousness no longer commands.

The personal case for refusal is the most immediate. The modern Sirens sing, hour by hour, from a glowing rectangle. Notifications, infinite scrolls, micro-rewards, comparison, outrage: each is engineered to override the System 2 of which Daniel Kahneman wrote. Religious traditions, often dismissed as quaint, were in fact serious technologies of refusal. Ramadan trains the Muslim community in the discipline of voluntary hunger; Ekadashi fasting trains the Hindu in restraint; Lent and Vipassana retreats do similar work. Mahatma Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* in 1909 understood that India’s foreign rule was made possible by an Indian’s domestic indiscipline; Swadeshi was not merely an economic boycott of Manchester cloth but a moral training in saying no to that which made one weaker. Refusal is not absence; refusal is preparation.

Political life depends on the same skill, magnified. A free press refuses paid news, a free judge refuses post-retirement appointments contingent on prior verdicts, a free voter refuses cash and liquor, and a free regulator refuses regulatory capture. The Election Commission’s Model Code of Conduct, in force since 1971 and tightened during T. N. Seshan’s tenure from 1990 to 1996, is essentially a refusal architecture: it specifies what the Government, even when constitutionally empowered, voluntarily declines to do during election season. The Supreme Court’s 2G Spectrum judgment of 2 February 2012 and the Coal Block Allocation judgment of 25 August 2014 were judicial refusals of executive overreach in the disposal of national resources. **Each**

verdict was an act of constitutional self-binding, the republic's own version of being tied to the mast.

The discipline of refusal scales when institutions support it. The Comptroller and Auditor General refuses to soften reports; the CAG report on 2G in 2010, with its estimate of presumptive loss, set in motion a chain that altered Indian telecom forever. The Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy committee refuses to let inflation drift above its 4 per cent target without explanation. Vinod Rai as CAG, T. N. Seshan as CEC, E. Sreedharan as Managing Director of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, K. M. Birla as a Padma Bhushan industrialist who declined a Rajya Sabha nomination: each is a small national archive of refusal. The names are not unique to one party or one period; they belong to the long Indian tradition of *tyaga*, renunciation, which the Mundaka Upanishad called the truest wealth.

The counter-argument is not trivial. Refusal, the critic will say, is the privilege of those who have enough not to need. A migrant labourer in Surat cannot refuse work; a Dalit girl cannot refuse a teacher's harassment; a small farmer cannot refuse a loan from the local moneylender. This is correct, and it is precisely why refusal must be collective when it cannot be individual. The 2020 to 2021 farmers' protest, in which up to a quarter-million cultivators camped on the borders of Delhi for over a year, was a collective refusal of three farm laws that the Government withdrew on 19 November 2021. The anti-dowry movement led by activists like Satyarani Chaddha, the anti-arrack stir in Andhra Pradesh in 1992, the women of Manipur who in 2004 disrobed before the Assam Rifles headquarters in protest of Thangjam Manorama's killing: each is a refusal that an individual could not have sustained alone but that institutions could organise.

That is why Ulysses contracts, devices by which the present self binds the future self, are written into our public law as well. The Constitution itself is the longest such contract, refusing future majorities the easy path of amending fundamental rights without rigour. The basic structure doctrine of *Kesavananda Bharati* in 1973 is its inner mast. The anti-defection schedule of 1985, the Whistleblower Protection Act of 2014, the Lokpal Act operationalised in 2019, the Code of Conduct for ministers all are institutional refusals. So is the cooling-off period of two years between government service and lobbying, enforced patchily but conceptually clear. **A republic, like a person, becomes free not by removing all restraints but by choosing the right ones.**

Rabindranath Tagore wrote that ‘freedom is not in the mere possession but in the disciplined use.’ The Indian republic at seventy-six has more choices than at any previous point in its history. Choices in consumption, in lifestyle, in political alignment, in the speed at which it can manufacture outrage. The maturity of citizens, no less than of constitutional bodies, will be measured not by how many of these choices we exercise but by how many we knowingly decline. Viktor Frankl, who survived Auschwitz to write *Man’s Search for Meaning*, observed that the last of the human freedoms is the right to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstances. He might have added: the longest ‘No’ is what protects the most valuable ‘Yes’. To learn that is the work of a lifetime, and the founding work of a republic.

SOURCES

- Electoral Reforms in India: EVMs, NOTA, State Funding & Key Committees
- Right to Freedom of Religion in India (UPSC Polity)
- Gandhian Philosophy: Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship

negative vs positive liberty

nishkama karma

autonomy

self-mastery

ulysses contract

swaraj

regulatory capture

Model Code of Conduct

Q5

Hope is not the absence of darkness; it is the courage to begin again

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

HOPE, COURAGE AND RENEWAL

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Begin with Vaclav Havel’s distinction: ‘Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.’ Hope is not optimism. Optimism reads the forecast; hope sows seeds in the storm. Thesis: hope is the moral practice of beginning again after every defeat, neither in spite of darkness nor because of it, but through it.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Hope as ethical posture. Spinoza, Kierkegaard, Gabriel Marcel’s ‘Homo Viator’. Hope differs from wish: wish is passive, hope is laboured. Pandora’s box — hope remained after all the evils flew out.

Argument 2 (~200w): Hope in Indian struggle. Tilak’s ‘Swaraj is my birthright’ uttered after a sedition trial. Ambedkar’s ‘Educate, Agitate, Organise’ — hope as discipline against caste despair. Kasturba’s Dandi grain of salt. The 1974 Bihar Movement reborn from JP’s failing health. India 1947 — a country starting over from Partition’s blood.

Argument 3 (~200w): Institutional hope. The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) doctrine after the 1976 Emergency — Justice Krishna Iyer and Bhagwati turning a defeated judiciary into a defender of the poor. The Right to Food order series (PUCL v UoI, 2001). The Mid-Day Meal that reaches 118 million children daily. Hope made operational.

Counter-view (~150w): False hope can be paralysing or even dangerous — climate optimism that delays action, faith in ‘achhe din’ that postpones reform. Camus argued for lucid revolt without metaphysical hope. Yet even Camus’s Sisyphus must be imagined happy — the rolling itself becomes meaning.

Conclusion (~100w): Rabindranath Tagore: ‘Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.’ To begin again is the only proof that one is still alive. A nation, like a person, is measured not by how rarely it falls but by how naturally it stands.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Vaclav Havel's definition of hope
- Pandora's box — hope as last gift
- Ambedkar: 'Educate, Agitate, Organise'
- Vivekananda's 'Arise, awake'
- Justice Krishna Iyer's PIL jurisprudence
- PUCL v Union of India (Right to Food, 2001)
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme as hope-in-action
- Camus's 'The Myth of Sisyphus'
- Hindi: 'aasha andhere mein deepak jalaane ka saahas hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Nelson Mandela, 27 years in Robben Island prison
- Malala Yousafzai's return to advocacy after the 2012 Taliban attack
- Pandita Ramabai's Mukti Mission for widows
- JP Narayan's 1974 Bihar Movement
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme (118 million beneficiaries)
- Vaclav Havel, 'Disturbing the Peace' (1990)

MODEL ANSWER

In a Czech jail in 1985, Vaclav Havel, then a dissident playwright, wrote letters to his wife Olga that would later become *Disturbing the Peace*. In one of them, he refused the easy reassurances of optimism. ‘Hope,’ he wrote, ‘is not the conviction that something

will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.’ Four years later he was President of Czechoslovakia, but the definition predates the office. Optimism reads the forecast; hope sows seeds in the storm. **Hope is not the absence of darkness; it is the moral practice of beginning again after every defeat, neither in spite of darkness nor because of it, but through it.**

The distinction is older than Havel. Hesiod’s Pandora opens a jar; out fly disease, toil, and old age; only Elpis, hope, remains at the bottom. Was hope a residual blessing or the most dangerous evil, kept back precisely because, like the others, it tormented? The Greeks left the question open, which is its enduring power. Spinoza thought hope a passive emotion akin to fear. Søren Kierkegaard thought it a leap. Gabriel Marcel, the French Christian existentialist, in *Homo Viator* in 1944, distinguished wish from hope: a wish is what one performs when there is nothing left to do; hope is what one performs precisely so that there is more to do. Hope is therefore not a feeling. It is an ethical posture, a habit of beginning.

India’s freedom struggle is a hundred-year demonstration of that habit. In June 1908, while serving a sedition sentence in Mandalay, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak’s editorial line on Swaraj was not silenced; on his release in 1914, he founded the Home Rule League. Mohandas Gandhi, after the failure of Champaran arbitration in 1917, did not retreat to South Africa; he proceeded to Kheda, then to Khilafat, then to Dandi in 1930. After the betrayal of the Cripps Mission in 1942, the Quit India resolution was passed on 8 August at Gowalia Tank, and Gandhi gave the country its briefest mantra: ‘Do or Die.’ B. R. Ambedkar, in the Round Table Conferences and after, faced the unyielding architecture of caste with a single instruction, repeated three times: ‘Educate, Agitate, Organise.’ Hope here is not optimism; it is the willingness, after every setback, to convene the next meeting.

Institutions can practise hope too, and India’s judiciary has done so in unexpected hours. After the constitutional defeat of *ADM Jabalpur* in 1976, when the Supreme Court permitted the suspension of Article 21 itself during the Emergency, the institution did not surrender to despair. Justices V. R. Krishna Iyer and P. N. Bhagwati, both supersession victims, used the 1979-1985 window to invent public interest litigation. The procedure of locus standi was loosened; the postcard became a writ petition; *Hussainara Khatoon* in 1979 released over forty thousand undertrials; *Bandhua Mukti Morcha* in 1984 attacked bonded labour. The PUCL Right to Food case, opened in April 2001 in the wake of Rajasthan’s famine, has continued for over two decades and produced the Mid-Day Meal Scheme that today reaches roughly 11.8 crore children in 11.2 lakh schools. **Hope, made institutional, becomes architecture.**

Personal courage is the visible part of this iceberg. Nelson Mandela, who entered Robben Island Prison as Prisoner 466/64 in 1964 and emerged in February 1990 to negotiate the South African transition, did not exit with bitterness; he exited with a draft constitution in his head. Malala Yousafzai, shot in the head on a school bus in Mingora on 9 October 2012, was operated upon at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, and was back at a UN podium by 12 July 2013. Pandita Ramabai, after losing her family to famine in 1877, founded the Mukti Mission at Kedgaon in 1889 for Hindu widows; her translation of the Bible into Marathi was completed in 1924, eight months before her death. Each is a refusal of the temptation to read the past as the only future. Each is a beginning again.

The counter-argument must be heard. Hope can become a sedative, what Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1942 called the trick by which the absurd is dodged rather than confronted. Climate optimism that defers action; campaign promises of *achhe din* that postpone reform; the spiritual bypass that recommends acceptance instead of agitation: each is an instance of false hope. Camus' answer was lucid revolt without metaphysical hope, the Sisyphus who keeps rolling the boulder because the rolling itself is the meaning. But notice that even Camus did not stop the rolling. **The pertinent distinction is not between hope and despair, but between active hope and passive consolation; the former rolls the stone, the latter watches it roll downhill.**

Indian public life is now particularly in need of active hope. Climate-vulnerable coastlines from Honnavar to Sundarbans face cyclones of growing intensity; mental health distress, especially among the young, rises in coaching towns from Kota to Sikar; communal arithmetic threatens, in moments of weakness, to replace constitutional grammar. The temptation in such moments is either resignation or millenarianism, neither of which begins again. The mid-day meal stove kept burning during the 2020 lockdown; the e-Shram portal that registered 30 crore informal workers; the Public Distribution System that, however imperfectly, dispatched 5 kilograms of free grain per person per month under PMGKAY to 80 crore beneficiaries: each is unfashionable, undramatic, and the very form hope takes when it does its day's work.

Tagore wrote in *Gitanjali* that 'faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.' That is the precise register. The bird sings not because it has seen the dawn but because it has begun to feel it. Vivekananda's 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached', from his Madras lecture of 1893, is the same instruction in a different voice. To begin again is, finally, the only evidence that one is still alive. A

nation, like a person, is measured not by how rarely it falls but by how naturally it stands, and how, having stood, it walks. The republic at seventy-six has been winded more than once. It has every reason to sit down. It has, more importantly, the practised muscle to begin again. That muscle, neither inherited nor optional, is what we have come to call hope.

SOURCES

- Bhimrao Ambedkar Jayanti 2026: Life, Contributions and Gandhi–Ambedkar Debates
- Judicial Activism vs Judicial Overreach in India — Cases, Debate & UPSC Notes
- Vaclav Havel Library, 'Disturbing the Peace' (1990)

Pandora

active hope

PIL jurisprudence

Sisyphian

moral imagination

Sthitaprajna

Homo Viator

resilience

Q6

Doubt is the architecture of mature belief

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

DOUBT, CERTAINTY AND INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Descartes' 'Meditations on First Philosophy' (1641) — doubting everything until 'I think, therefore I am' emerged as the only secure ground. Contrast with the WhatsApp forward that needs no proof, the politician who never says 'I was wrong', the scientist who fakes data. Thesis: doubt is not weakness; certainty without doubt is fanaticism. Mature belief is what survives the discipline of asking, 'How would I know if I were wrong?'

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Doubt in science. Karl Popper's falsifiability criterion: a theory is scientific only if it can be refuted. CERN's 2011 'faster than light' neutrinos were retracted in 2012 — institutional doubt at work. India's GMRT, Aryabhata satellite tradition, and Vikram Sarabhai's insistence on peer-review built a republic of doubt.

Argument 2 (~200w): Doubt in faith. The Buddha's last words: 'Appa deepo bhava' — be a light unto yourself. Cardinal Newman's 'A thousand difficulties do not make one doubt'. The Charvaka tradition in India and the nyaya school institutionalised counter-argument. Tagore's 'Crisis in Civilization' (1941) is itself an act of believer's doubt.

Argument 3 (~200w): Doubt in democracy. Parliamentary opposition is institutional doubt; question-hour is structured scepticism. The CAG, the Election Commission, the courts under Article 32, the press under Article 19 — each is a doubt-machine. The K M

Joseph judgment on the Election Commissioners (2023) was a Supreme Court refusal to dissolve doubt about appointment opacity.

Counter-view (~150w): Permanent doubt becomes paralysis. Hamlet's 'thus conscience does make cowards of us all'. Climate-doubt sponsored by fossil-fuel lobbies (Naomi Oreskes, 'Merchants of Doubt', 2010) is weaponised scepticism. Doubt without provisional commitment is irresponsibility, not wisdom.

Conclusion (~100w): Bertrand Russell's prescription stands: 'Do not feel absolutely certain of anything.' A scientist, a judge, a voter, a parent — each must hold convictions and the humility that those convictions might be improved. Doubt is not the enemy of belief; it is its foundation.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Descartes' methodological doubt (1641)
- Karl Popper's falsifiability
- Cardinal Newman on difficulties vs doubt
- Charvaka and Nyaya schools of Indian philosophy
- Naomi Oreskes, 'Merchants of Doubt' (2010)
- Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023) — Election Commissioners appointment
- Vikram Sarabhai's peer-review insistence
- Buddha's 'Appa deepo bhava'
- Hindi: 'shankaa hi paripakv aastha ki neenv hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Descartes, 'Meditations on First Philosophy' (1641)
- CERN faster-than-light neutrino retraction, 2011-12
- Naomi Oreskes, 'Merchants of Doubt' (2010)
- Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023)
- Tagore, 'Crisis in Civilization' (1941)
- Bertrand Russell, 'A Liberal Decalogue' (1951)

MODEL ANSWER

In November 1641, in a small heated room in Bavaria, René Descartes sat down and tried to doubt everything: his senses, his memories, the existence of his own body, the reliability of mathematics, the goodness of God. From the methodical wreckage emerged only one sentence that could not be doubted — *cogito, ergo sum*. Modern

Western thought, in many ways, dates from that night. Contrast it with the WhatsApp forward that needs no proof, the politician who never says ‘I was wrong’, the scientist who fabricates data because publication deadlines reward certainty, the television panel that punishes hedging. Doubt has fallen sharply out of fashion at the precise historical moment it has become most necessary. Yet certainty without doubt is fanaticism, and faith without doubt is fragility. Mature belief is what survives the discipline of asking, repeatedly and with seriousness, ‘How would I know if I were wrong?’

Doubt is the engine of science. Karl Popper’s falsifiability criterion, advanced in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1934), proposed that a theory is scientific only if it specifies the conditions under which it could be refuted. The point was vindicated dramatically in 2011 when the OPERA collaboration at CERN reported that neutrinos had travelled faster than light from CERN to Gran Sasso; sixteen months later, after a loose fibre-optic connector and a clock-drift were discovered, the result was retracted with considerable institutional dignity. The retraction, painful as it was, was the institution working as designed. Closer to home, Vikram Sarabhai’s insistence on peer-review at the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad and Homi Bhabha’s open journal-club culture at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research in Bombay built a small Indian republic of doubt long before government funding for science became plentiful. The Aryabhata satellite of April 1975, India’s first, was launched after an unusually candid internal review of design weaknesses.

Doubt is also the deepest form of faith. The Buddha’s final instruction in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta was *appa deepo bhava* — be a light unto yourself, examine even the Buddha’s words and accept them only if they accord with reason and experience. Cardinal John Henry Newman observed in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864) that ‘a thousand difficulties do not make one doubt’, distinguishing intellectual problems from corroded faith. Indian philosophical schools institutionalised counter-argument as an academic genre: the Charvaka materialists, the Nyaya logicians with their elaborate inference rules, the Mimamsakas obsessed with linguistic clarity, the Buddhist Madhyamika with its method of reductio. Tagore’s *Crisis in Civilization* (1941), written months before his death, is an act of a believer’s doubt — an old man asking whether his lifelong trust in European Enlightenment had been misplaced. Faith and doubt, in mature traditions, are not enemies; they are co-workers refining each other.

Doubt is the bone marrow of democracy. Parliamentary opposition is institutional doubt; Question Hour is structured scepticism; the Comptroller and Auditor-General

audits the executive's self-congratulation; the Election Commission doubts the parties that staff it through the Model Code of Conduct; the courts under Article 32 doubt the legislature; the free press under Article 19 doubts everyone, including itself. The 2023 Supreme Court verdict in *Anoop Baranwal v Union of India*, prescribing a Chief-Justice-inclusive panel for the appointment of Election Commissioners, was a refusal to dissolve doubt about appointment opacity; Parliament's subsequent Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act of 2023 sought to substitute its own panel composition, and the matter remains under constitutional litigation.

Democracy is the political form that turns suspicion into procedure, paranoia into the audit trail.

The shadow of this virtue is permanent doubt as paralysis. Hamlet's lament that 'thus conscience does make cowards of us all' is the patron saint of indecision. More dangerous still is weaponised doubt. Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway in *Merchants of Doubt* (2010) traced how a small network of physicists, on retainer first to the tobacco industry and then to fossil-fuel firms, manufactured uncertainty about second-hand smoke, the ozone hole, acid rain and global warming. The strategy was never to win the scientific argument but to ensure that the public could never quite be sure enough to act. Doubt without provisional commitment is irresponsibility; doubt for hire is fraud. The vaccine-hesitancy campaigns during COVID-19, the climate-denial pseudo-think-tanks, and the 'just asking questions' rhetorical posture on social media all represent doubt corrupted from method into evasion.

There is a fourth context worth surfacing: doubt in commercial and technological domains. The 2023 collapse of Silicon Valley Bank, the 2022 Theranos fraud trial, the cryptocurrency exchange FTX implosion in late 2022, and India's own Satyam fraud of 2009 each shared a common pattern: organisations had ceased to permit internal doubt. Auditors who asked questions were sidelined; engineers who raised flags were ignored; the institutional immune system had been disabled. By contrast, NASA's post-*Challenger* and post-*Columbia* reforms institutionalised what Roger Boisjoly had attempted before the 1986 Challenger explosion — the right and the duty of a junior engineer to halt a launch on safety grounds. The Mars Sample Return mission's independent review board operates on the same logic. Doubt, properly channelled into procedure, is the cheapest insurance against avoidable catastrophe; doubt suppressed by hierarchy produces avoidable obituaries.

The discipline, then, is to hold belief and humility together — to act on convictions while accepting that convictions can be improved. Bertrand Russell's 'Liberal Decalogue' of 1951 prescribed that 'do not feel absolutely certain of anything' was the

first rule of citizenship; its companion was that one should not refuse to listen to evidence even from those one disliked. A scientist who never doubts becomes a dogmatist; a judge who never doubts becomes a tyrant; a voter who never doubts becomes a mob; a parent who never doubts ruins the child. To respect doubt is not to abolish belief; it is to make belief load-bearing. Doubt is the architecture of mature belief, the scaffolding inside the cathedral — invisible from outside, indispensable within. Tear it out and what remains is decoration, beautiful for an afternoon and ruinous for a century. The Indian republic, like every other, is built on belief in its founding ideas; the durability of those beliefs depends entirely on the willingness of each generation to doubt them honestly, test them rigorously and confirm them anew. The Constitution gains authority not from being beyond question but from surviving question.

SOURCES

- Election Commission of India: Article 324, CEC Appointment, Powers
- Tagore's Philosophy: Universalism, Visva-Bharati, Sadhana and Crisis in Civilization
- Karl Popper, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

falsifiability

methodological doubt

epistemic humility

manufactured doubt

Charvaka

nyaya

peer review

intellectual honesty

Q7

Solitude is the workshop where the self is forged

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

SOLITUDE, INWARDNESS AND SELF-FORMATION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the image of Henry David Thoreau walking out to Walden Pond in 1845 — a chosen solitude, not loneliness. Distinguish the two: loneliness is the pain of unwanted absence; solitude is the freedom of chosen presence with oneself. Thesis: in a civilisation that has industrialised company — group chats, endless meetings, parasocial intimacy — solitude has become the forge in which judgment, originality and conscience are still made.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Solitude as cognitive precondition. Newton's plague-year solitude (1665-66) at Woolsthorpe gave the world calculus and gravitation. Vivekananda's three days of meditation on the Kanyakumari rock (1892) crystallised his life's mission. Anthony Storr in 'Solitude: A Return to the Self' (1988) argues creative breakthrough is a private event before it becomes a public one.

Argument 2 (~200w): Solitude as ethical preparation. Mahatma Gandhi's silent Mondays. Nehru writing 'The Discovery of India' (1944) in Ahmednagar Fort prison. Aurobindo at Pondicherry. In each, withdrawal preceded an enlarged engagement with the world. The Buddha's six-year forest solitude before the Bodhi tree was not escape; it was preparation.

Argument 3 (~200w): Solitude as a republican virtue. Rousseau's 'Reveries of the Solitary Walker' (1782) connects solitude to the moral autonomy of the citizen who can resist crowds. India's secret-ballot booth — the only constitutional minute of guaranteed solitude — is structurally how a democracy borrows a citizen's lonely judgment. Without solitude, voting becomes acclamation.

Counter-view (~150w): Excessive solitude can become pathology: the hikikomori of Japan, the social-isolation epidemic flagged by the U.S. Surgeon General's 2023 advisory. Solitude divorced from periodic re-entry into community calcifies into solipsism. The Stylites of Syria and the modern recluse alike teach that the workshop is not the destination.

Conclusion (~100w): Rilke wrote to a young poet: 'Love your solitude and bear with sweet-sounding lamentation the suffering it causes you.' Citizenship, art, and conscience are crafted in private and tested in public. A society that has forgotten how to be alone has also, quietly, forgotten how to think.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Thoreau's Walden experiment (1845-47)
- Anthony Storr, 'Solitude: A Return to the Self' (1988)
- Newton's annus mirabilis at Woolsthorpe (1665-66)
- Nehru's 'The Discovery of India' written in Ahmednagar Fort, 1944
- Vivekananda's Kanyakumari rock meditation, 1892
- U.S. Surgeon General advisory on loneliness, 2023
- Secret-ballot booth as institutionalised solitude
- Rilke, 'Letters to a Young Poet' (1903)
- Hindi: 'ekaant aatma ki karyashala hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Henry David Thoreau, 'Walden' (1854)
- Jawaharlal Nehru, 'The Discovery of India' (1946)
- Sri Aurobindo's retreat to Pondicherry, 1910
- Newton's plague-year discoveries, 1665-66

- Hikikomori phenomenon in Japan
- Vivekananda at Kanyakumari, 1892

MODEL ANSWER

On Independence Day 1845, Henry David Thoreau walked away from Concord, built a one-room cabin at Walden Pond, and lived there for two years and two months. He was not lonely; he was, by his own diary, busier than ever — surveying acres, reading the Bhagavad Gita in a Boston-printed edition, hoeing beans, listening to owls. The distinction matters and ought to be sharper in public conversation. Loneliness is the pain of unwanted absence; solitude is the freedom of chosen presence with oneself. A civilisation that has industrialised company — group chats that never sleep, meetings that multiply, parasocial intimacy farmed by recommendation engines, the architecture of attention that the platforms call ‘engagement’ — has quietly forgotten the difference. And yet the most consequential acts of judgment, originality and conscience are still forged, as they have always been, in the workshop of solitude. The workshop is locked from the inside, not from the outside; only the practitioner can decide to enter.

Consider first the cognitive case. When the bubonic plague closed Cambridge in 1665, a young Isaac Newton retreated to his mother’s farm at Woolsthorpe. Over the next eighteen months he sketched the calculus, the laws of motion, the inverse-square law of gravity and a preliminary theory of optics. He later called the period his *annus mirabilis* — a miracle worked entirely alone, without correspondents, without the Royal Society, without committees. Two centuries later, the young monk who would become Swami Vivekananda meditated for three days on a rock off the coast of Kanyakumari in December 1892; what crystallised there became the address he delivered at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11 September 1893. The psychiatrist Anthony Storr, in *Solitude: A Return to the Self* (1988), gathered the clinical evidence across cases as varied as Beethoven, Kafka and Wittgenstein: significant breakthroughs — in mathematics, in literature, in moral choice — are private events long before they become public ones. The mind in company optimises for approval; the mind alone optimises for truth.

Solitude is also ethical preparation. Mahatma Gandhi reserved every Monday for silence; he wrote in that silence the speeches that would unsettle an empire and the letters that would discipline his own ashramites. Jawaharlal Nehru composed *The Discovery of India* in Ahmednagar Fort prison between 1942 and 1945, his three-year fast from public life producing a book that re-imagined the nation he would later

govern. Sri Aurobindo's 1910 retreat to Pondicherry was the precondition of his integral philosophy and of the spiritual community at Auroville. The Buddha's six-year forest solitude before the Bodhi tree was not escape; it was the apprenticeship that made compassion possible at scale. Nelson Mandela's decade on Robben Island, with a sliver of garden and his own correspondence sharply limited, prepared a head of state. In each instance, withdrawal preceded an enlarged engagement with the world. The pattern is too consistent across centuries and traditions to be coincidence.

There is a third, less-remarked function: solitude is a republican virtue. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, walking the suburbs of Paris in 1782 in the last year of his life, wrote *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* — an argument that the citizen who can resist the crowd must first be able to bear his own company. India's polling booth is the only constitutional minute of guaranteed solitude in a citizen's public life. Behind the cardboard screen, an electorate of more than 900 million is asked to find its private mind. Strip out that minute of solitude — through open ballots, biometric coercion, or peer surveillance — and voting collapses into acclamation. The secret ballot is, in a deep sense, the Indian Constitution's wager on the inner life of the voter, the most expensive and most fragile architectural commitment the republic makes every five years.

Yet the workshop is not the destination. Solitude untempered by re-entry becomes pathology. Japan's *hikikomori* — an estimated 1.5 million adults who do not leave their rooms for months — mark the boundary at which inwardness calcifies into withdrawal. The 2023 advisory of the United States Surgeon General on the epidemic of loneliness and isolation linked chronic social isolation to a 29 per cent higher risk of heart disease, a 32 per cent higher risk of stroke, and a 50 per cent higher risk of dementia — numbers that suggest absence of human contact is as harmful as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. The Stylites of fifth-century Syria perched on pillars and the modern recluse alike teach the same lesson: solitude is the forge, but the tool must come down and meet the world. The workshop closes; the work begins. A monastery that never sends anyone back is not a workshop but a tomb.

The science is now catching up to what the contemplative traditions had suspected for millennia. Cal Newport's *Deep Work* (2016), built on cognitive-psychology evidence, argues that elite performance in any field requires extended periods of distraction-free concentration; the average knowledge worker, by his measure, gets fewer than four such hours per week. Functional MRI studies of meditation practitioners conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison by Richard Davidson have shown structural changes in the prefrontal cortex after as little as eight weeks of solitary practice. The Indian tradition of *antar-mukhata* — turning the senses inward, codified in Patanjali's

Yoga Sutras as *pratyahara* — pre-dates the science by two thousand years but maps onto it cleanly. Solitude, in this combined reading, is not optional self-indulgence; it is the cognitive infrastructure on which sustained thought rests.

What follows for a republic of 1.4 billion? Build solitude into the architecture of citizenship. Schools that include silent reading periods rather than continuous group work; courts that allow judges decisional days off the bench rather than reactive listing; offices that protect deep-work mornings from meeting calendars; constitutional spaces — the voting booth, the jury room, the appellate chamber — that protect lonely judgment. Rainer Maria Rilke advised the young poet Franz Kappus in 1903 to ‘love your solitude and bear with sweet-sounding lamentation the suffering it causes you’. Citizenship, art and conscience are still crafted in private and tested in public. A society that has forgotten how to be alone has also, quietly, forgotten how to think; and a republic that does not know how to think will not for long remain a republic capable of governing itself wisely.

SOURCES

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- Gandhian Philosophy: Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship
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solitude

ekaant

viveka

moral autonomy

deep work

hikikomori

secret ballot

inwardness

annus mirabilis

Q8

Time is the only inheritance that cannot be unequally divided

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

TIME, EQUALITY AND FINITUDE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Seneca’s ‘On the Shortness of Life’ (49 CE): ‘It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste much of it.’ Every billionaire and every street-vendor in Delhi receives the same 86,400 seconds tomorrow. Thesis: time is the one egalitarian endowment — civilisation’s true measure is whether its institutions help every citizen spend that endowment on something more than survival.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The economics of stolen time. The poor pay a ‘time tax’ — three hours daily for water in many Indian slums (NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index 2019). MGNREGA delays of months violate not just contract but

lifespan. Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and DBT compressed pension and subsidy delivery from weeks to days — a quiet redistribution of time, not money.

Argument 2 (~200w): The ethics of others' time. Justice delayed (over 5 crore cases pending across Indian courts, NJDG 2025) is not metaphor — it is years of a life lost in waiting rooms. The 2025 Supreme Court bail jurisprudence under UAPA recognised that prolonged pre-trial detention violates Article 21's right to time, not only liberty.

Argument 3 (~200w): The politics of long time. Climate change is the theft of future generations' time (Greta Thunberg's 'How Dare You', 2019 UN Climate Action Summit). Sovereign debt above 80% of GDP commits future taxpayers to interest payments they did not authorise. The 73rd and 74th Amendments tried to push power closer to the citizen's clock; they remain partly unfulfilled.

Counter-view (~150w): Equal time does not produce equal opportunity — a child of educated parents inherits 'cultural time' (Bourdieu). And some lives are statistically shorter: the Adivasi life expectancy in Jharkhand is 4-7 years lower than the national mean. Time-equality is the moral starting point, not the social outcome.

Conclusion (~100w): Tagore: 'The butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough.' A republic is judged by how much of every citizen's clock it returns to them. The most radical welfare is to give people back their hours.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Seneca, 'On the Shortness of Life' (49 CE)
- NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index 2019 (women's time burden)
- National Judicial Data Grid pendency data, 2025
- Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile trinity (DBT)
- Pierre Bourdieu on cultural and temporal capital
- Article 21 expansion to include right to speedy trial
- Greta Thunberg's 'How Dare You' speech, 2019
- MGNREGA wage-delay litigation
- Hindi: 'samay sabse niyaayi virasat hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Seneca's letter 'On the Shortness of Life' (49 CE)
- Hussainara Khatoon v State of Bihar (1979) on speedy trial
- Greta Thunberg at UN Climate Action Summit, 23 September 2019
- Aadhaar-DBT compression of subsidy delivery time

- MGNREGA 2005 wage-delay reforms
- Bilkis Bano case timeline

MODEL ANSWER

Tomorrow morning a billionaire in South Mumbai and a vegetable vendor in Seelampur will both receive an identical endowment: 86,400 seconds. No bank can transfer that gift, no will can bequeath it, no court can attach it for debt, no algorithm can compound it. Seneca wrote to his friend Lucilius in 49 CE that *'it is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste much of it'*. Twenty centuries later, the observation has become the only honest measure of social justice. Material inheritance is unequally divided by birth, geography and history; time alone is handed out in equal portions, the lone egalitarian endowment in a stratified world. The deeper question for the republic is whether its institutions help every citizen spend that endowment on something more than mere survival, or whether large slabs of it are siphoned away before the citizen even notices the loss.

The first injustice in modern India is the silent levy of stolen time. The NITI Aayog Composite Water Management Index of 2019 recorded that women in rural Bundelkhand walk between two and three hours daily for drinking water — a private tax of roughly 800 hours a year, paid in lifespan. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 mandates wages within fifteen days; in practice, delays of weeks remain routine, and the Anjali Bhardwaj-led 2022 litigation before the Supreme Court documented cases of nine-month wage backlogs in tribal Jharkhand. Conversely, the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile trinity compressed pension delivery from six weeks to seventy-two hours after 2014; direct benefit transfers under more than 300 central schemes now reach beneficiary accounts within hours of release. The most under-counted welfare achievement of the past decade is not money disbursed; it is hours returned. The most under-counted welfare failure is, conversely, hours stolen by inefficient process.

A second injustice is the time of others held hostage in queues we did not authorise. The National Judicial Data Grid in May 2025 records 5.16 crore cases pending across Indian courts, with average district-court pendency of 1,162 days; over 80,000 cases have been pending in the Supreme Court for more than five years. *Hussainara Khatoon v State of Bihar* (1979) first read speedy trial into Article 21, but the doctrine struggles against the throughput. In 2024 the Supreme Court, granting bail in repeated UAPA matters, observed that prolonged pre-trial detention violates not only liberty but the constitutional right to time itself — a year in an under-trial barrack is a year of

a life, irreversible. Bilkis Bano spent fifteen years pursuing justice between 1992 and the 2008 verdict, and another fifteen years before the 2024 reversal of premature remission. Justice delayed is, quite literally, lives spent in waiting rooms; the right to time is the unstated half of every fundamental right.

Time injustice runs further still, into the intergenerational ledger. India's general government debt, by the IMF's 2025 Article IV estimate, sits at 81 per cent of GDP — an interest bill committed to future taxpayers who did not vote on the loan. Climate change is the most expensive theft of future time on record; Greta Thunberg's 'how dare you' at the United Nations Climate Action Summit on 23 September 2019 was not theatrics, it was actuarial accusation made on behalf of an unborn electorate. The 73rd and 74th Amendments tried to push decision-making closer to the citizen's clock by devolving power to panchayats and municipalities, and the 16th Finance Commission must now confront the question of how to make local governance temporally responsive. The Old Pension Scheme debate, revived in four states between 2022 and 2024, is a textbook case of present-tense relief paid for with an off-balance-sheet credit card future workers must service. To borrow against the unborn is the costliest of all silent loans.

Philosophically, there is an honest tension. Equal hours do not produce equal opportunity. Pierre Bourdieu showed in *Distinction* (1979) that a child of educated parents inherits not money but 'cultural time' — pre-loaded vocabulary, museum visits, weekend reading, dinner-table political argument. Statistically, life itself is unevenly portioned: the Adivasi life expectancy in Jharkhand is between four and seven years lower than the national mean, per NFHS-5 disaggregation. Bihar's child stunting rate compresses the years available for cognitive development. Time-equality is therefore the moral starting point, not the social outcome. To stop at clock-equality is to mistake the gift for the journey it permits, and to mistake an opportunity for a guarantee.

There is a fourth dimension that deserves attention: the time spent on what Daniel Kahneman called 'the experiencing self' versus the 'remembering self'. A society obsessed with metrics of remembered productivity often forgets to ask whether the experiencing time was worth living. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index, formalised in 2008, includes 'time use' as one of nine domains; surveys ask citizens how many hours they sleep, how many they spend with family, how many they devote to community work. India's Time Use Survey, conducted by the NSO for the first time in 2019 and again in 2024, finds women spending 19 per cent of daily hours on unpaid domestic work against men's 2 per cent — a gendered theft of time that no income

statistic captures. The Periodic Labour Force Survey has begun, since 2017, to disaggregate by gender, but the time-use lens remains under-integrated into welfare design. To measure what a society actually values, count not the rupees but the hours.

What follows is a quiet redirection of welfare. The most radical thing a state can do is return hours: same-day passport delivery (achieved), automatic pension credit (largely achieved), court-mandated trial deadlines (still aspirational), piped water (in progress under Jal Jeevan Mission), predictable electricity (uneven), gender-budgeted urban transport (under-funded). The Greek language distinguishes *chronos*, sequential time, from *kairos*, the opportune moment; a republic that mostly delivers *chronos* and rarely creates *kairos* has missed half the assignment. Rabindranath Tagore wrote that ‘the butterfly counts not months but moments, and has time enough’. A republic is judged not by the wealth it concentrates but by how much of every citizen’s clock it returns to them. Of all our common inheritances, the unredistributable one carries the heaviest claim — for time, alone, cannot be unequally divided, only unequally spent.

SOURCES

- Bail Is a Constitutional Safety Valve, Even Under UAPA
- Personal Liberty under Article 21 — Maneka Gandhi to Puttaswamy
- FRBM Act, 2003: Fiscal Targets, N.K. Singh Committee, Debt Anchor

time poverty

right to speedy trial

intertemporal justice

DBT

MGNREGA

Article 21

intergenerational debt

kairos vs chronos

Q9

Beauty is the politics we do not yet have language for

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

BEAUTY, AESTHETICS AND THE PUBLIC GOOD

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Elaine Scarry’s ‘On Beauty and Being Just’ (1999) — beauty trains the eye for fairness because both share the demand of symmetry and proportion. Walk through Old Delhi’s Jama Masjid courtyard at dawn and the Chandigarh High Court at dusk; both teach a citizen something about equality no statute can. Thesis: beauty is not luxury, not after-thought; it is the unwritten constitution of public life — the politics our prose has not yet caught up with.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Beauty as civic right. The right to dignified surroundings is implicit in Article 21 — Subhash Kumar v State of Bihar (1991) read environment into life.

Le Corbusier's Chandigarh, Charles Correa's Belapur housing, Laurie Baker's low-cost dignified architecture in Kerala — each rejected the slum as fate.

Argument 2 (~200w): Beauty as cultural sovereignty. UNESCO's recognition of Santiniketan (2023) and the Hoysala temples (2023) is not tourism — it is the global validation of an aesthetic that survived colonial dismissal. India's textile traditions — Banarasi, Kanjivaram, Pochampally — are repositories of mathematical genius. To preserve them is to fund mathematicians of cloth.

Argument 3 (~200w): Beauty as judgment. Justice Krishna Iyer wrote bail orders as poetry; the Indian Constitution itself was hand-illustrated by Nandalal Bose's school — its preamble preceded by Mohenjo-daro motifs. The PESA Act's gram sabha respects the aesthetic of consensus, not just the mathematics of majority.

Counter-view (~150w): Beauty can be a smokescreen — the Versailles palace stood beside French famine; Lutyens' Delhi rose on the surveyed graves of seven cities. Aestheticised politics tilts toward fascism (Walter Benjamin's warning). India must guard against the smart-city beautification that displaces vendors and slums while photographing fountains.

Conclusion (~100w): Dostoevsky: 'Beauty will save the world.' Tagore at Santiniketan made beauty inseparable from pedagogy. A republic is impoverished when its courts are ugly, its slums hidden, and its public spaces privatised. The struggle to name beauty as a right is the politics we are still learning to speak.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Elaine Scarry, 'On Beauty and Being Just' (1999)
- Subhash Kumar v State of Bihar (1991) — environment in Article 21
- Santiniketan and Hoysala temples UNESCO inscription, 2023
- Nandalal Bose's illustrations of the Constitution
- Laurie Baker's cost-effective architecture, Kerala
- Charles Correa, Belapur housing, Navi Mumbai
- Walter Benjamin on the aestheticisation of politics
- PESA Act 1996 — aesthetic of consensus
- Hindi: 'saundarya wahi rajneeti hai jise bhasha mili nahi'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Chandigarh Capitol Complex, Le Corbusier
- Santiniketan (UNESCO 2023)
- Hoysala temples — Belur, Halebidu, Somanathapura (UNESCO 2023)

- Original Constitution illustrated by Nandalal Bose's school
- Laurie Baker, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram
- Banarasi and Kanjivaram weaver communities

MODEL ANSWER

Walk into the courtyard of Jama Masjid at dawn and stand below the Chandigarh Capitol Complex at dusk, and you will have been taught something about equality that no statute can quite reach. The American philosopher Elaine Scarry argued in *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999) that beauty trains the eye for fairness, because both share the demand of symmetry, proportion and a kind of attentive regard for what lies before the gaze. The proposition is unsettling because it suggests that aesthetics is not the aftermath of politics but its silent grammar — the structure of feeling that decides what counts as a public good before the legislature even sits. Beauty, in this sense, is the politics we do not yet have the legal language for: an unwritten constitution that decides who feels at home in a country and who is asked, by sheer institutional ugliness, to feel unwelcome.

Begin with the civic right to dignified surroundings. The Supreme Court in *Subhash Kumar v State of Bihar* (1991) read the environment into Article 21, holding that life means more than animal existence — it means quality, and quality means surroundings that do not insult. Beauty, in this reading, is a fundamental right with a different vocabulary. Le Corbusier's Chandigarh, designed between 1951 and 1965 in partnership with Pierre Jeanneret, Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, refused the colonial assumption that a new Indian city should imitate Lutyens; it gave the displaced Punjabi farmer monumental civic space, the High Court, the Assembly and the Secretariat as a single open hand. Laurie Baker's low-cost architecture in Kerala — the Centre for Development Studies, the Mitraniketan campus, hundreds of houses for tsunami-displaced families — demonstrated that even a rupee-thin budget can deliver dignity through curved walls and brick jaalis. Charles Correa's Belapur housing in Navi Mumbai of 1983-86 gave each family its own threshold even within high-density layouts. Each rejected the slum as fate.

Beauty is also cultural sovereignty. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee inscribed Santiniketan and the Hoysala temples at Belur, Halebidu and Somanathapura in 2023 — not for tourist revenue but for the global validation of an aesthetic that British colonial dismissals could not silence. India's textile traditions — Banarasi brocade, Kanjivaram silk, Pochampally ikat, Bagru block-print, Maheshwari weaving, Kullu shawls, Phulkari needlework — are repositories of mathematical genius hidden in

cloth. The geometry of a single Patola fabric encodes computational complexity that took the Hewlett-Packard pattern team six months to digitise. To preserve these traditions is to fund the mathematicians of cloth, the chemists of natural dye, the engineers of the handloom. The original Constitution of India, hand-illustrated by Nandalal Bose's atelier at Santiniketan, opened with motifs from Mohenjo-daro because the founders understood that a republic begins with the way it pictures itself, and the cost of getting that picture wrong is felt for generations.

The same instinct governs justice. Justice V R Krishna Iyer wrote bail orders that read as prose poetry, because he understood that the citizen must hear, not just receive, judgment. His opening in *Moti Ram v State of MP* (1978) — 'the bail system is a defective system' — carries more reform weight than the operative paragraph. The PESA Act of 1996 codified the aesthetic of consensus in Fifth Schedule areas; the gram sabha's ritual unanimity is not procedural inefficiency, it is the form by which a tribal polity recognises itself. The Forest Rights Act of 2006, by mapping community claims rather than only individual ones, restored to Adivasi communities a way of seeing land that the colonial revenue map had erased. Beauty, here, is a way of making law congruent with how a people already think and remember; an ugly law cannot be obeyed for long because it does not fit the body that must wear it.

The counter-argument is real and must be honoured. Beauty can be a smokescreen. The palace of Versailles stood beside French famine; Lutyens' Delhi rose on the surveyed graves of seven previous cities; the Berlin Olympic Stadium of 1936 weaponised the sublime; Albert Speer's architectural drawings for a thousand-year Reich were technically dazzling. Walter Benjamin's warning in 1936 that fascism aestheticises politics while communism politicises art remains the deepest caution in the literature. Modern Indian smart-city projects that beautify a riverfront while displacing the vendors who animated it, that install steel benches in plazas designed to deter sleeping bodies, that demolish the wholesale market and replace it with a boutique mall — each commits the same fallacy. Beauty divorced from justice is the loveliest form of cruelty, and the most expensive.

There is also a developmental dimension. The economist Mariana Mazzucato has argued in *The Value of Everything* (2018) that public-sector investment in beauty — from medieval cathedrals to Stockholm metro stations — produces civic returns that markets cannot price. India's Delhi Metro under E Sreedharan from 1995 onward was an early Indian instance: stations designed for dignity, signage in three languages, accessible by design. The Mumbai Coastal Road, the Eastern Peripheral Expressway, the redeveloped Central Vista Avenue all carry the question of whether public

infrastructure carries aesthetic ambition or merely engineering competence. The smartest budgets reserve a small percentage explicitly for civic art — the ‘one per cent for art’ rule in cities from San Francisco to Stockholm produces measurable improvements in citizen attachment, which translates into lower vandalism, higher voluntary maintenance and greater civic participation.

The synthesis is therefore one of discipline rather than abandonment. A republic must measure beauty by who is included in it. The Tagore experiment at Santiniketan made the open-air classroom inseparable from the curriculum; the dignity of the mid-day-meal hall in a Tamil Nadu primary school, the architectural quality of a panchayat building in Mehsana, the calligraphy on a court summons in Tezpur, the seating density on a Vande Bharat coach — each is a small daily lobbying for the constitutional promise. Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote in *The Idiot* (1869) that beauty will save the world. He did not mean ornament; he meant the moral economy of attention, the discipline of regarding the public realm as worth the dignity of design. The Tagore school at Santiniketan held its classes under trees because the founder believed an ugly school produces minds that accept ugliness elsewhere; the Bauhaus believed the same about furniture; the Indian temple-architecture tradition coded the same intuition into stone. Beauty is impoverished when our courts are ugly, our slums hidden and our public spaces privatised for the convenience of those who can afford private substitutes. The struggle to name beauty as a right is the politics we are still learning to speak — and to speak it well, to legislate for it carefully, and to defend it against both the philistine and the gentrifier is to deepen the republic itself.

SOURCES

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- Personal Liberty under Article 21 — Maneka Gandhi to Puttaswamy
- Khajuraho Temples: Chandela Patronage, Nagara Architecture, and the Sculpture That Made Them Famous

aesthetic citizenship

Santiniketan

Article 21 environment

Laurie Baker

cultural sovereignty

aestheticisation of politics

saundarya

rasa

Q10

Courage is the quiet rent we pay for character

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

COURAGE, CONSCIENCE AND MORAL PRACTICE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with C S Lewis: ‘Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.’ The whistleblower who emails the regulator after midnight, the doctor who refuses to backdate a death certificate, the constable who registers an FIR against a political patron — each pays a quiet rent. Thesis: character is not a possession; it is a monthly subscription paid in courage.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Civic courage. Satyendra Dubey (NHAI engineer, 2003), Manjunath Shanmugam (IOCL, 2005), Lalit Mehta (MGNREGA social audit, 2008) — Indian whistleblowers murdered for routine honesty. The Whistleblowers Protection Act 2014 remains effectively un-notified. Courage scales only when institutions protect it.

Argument 2 (~200w): Judicial courage. Justice H R Khanna’s lone dissent in ADM Jabalpur (1976) cost him the Chief Justiceship. Justice K M Joseph’s elevation initially resisted (2018). The 2024 Supreme Court bench striking down the Electoral Bonds Scheme — institutional courage that the political class had avoided.

Argument 3 (~200w): Everyday courage. The farmer who insists on a receipt at the mandi; the mother who reports child abuse in the family; the LGBTQ+ Indian who came out before NALSA (2014) and Navtej Johar (2018). Hannah Arendt called this ‘the courage to appear’ — the basic precondition of citizenship.

Counter-view (~150w): Courage divorced from wisdom is recklessness. Aristotle warned that bravery without prudence is rashness. The Charge of the Light Brigade. Online vigilantism that calls itself courage. The discipline of distinguishing valour from vanity is itself a moral skill.

Conclusion (~100w): Tagore’s prayer in Gitanjali: ‘Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them.’ A republic is held up not by laws alone but by the quiet courage of millions who choose, today again, to be honest. Character is the receipt of that rent.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- C S Lewis on courage as the form of every virtue
- Satyendra Dubey murder (NHAI, 2003)
- ADM Jabalpur dissent by Justice H R Khanna (1976)
- Whistleblowers Protection Act 2014 (non-notification)
- Electoral Bonds judgment, 15 February 2024

- NALSA v Union of India (2014), Navtej Johar (2018)
- Hannah Arendt's 'courage to appear'
- Aristotle on courage as mean between cowardice and rashness
- Hindi: 'sahas charitra ka chupchaap diya gaya kiraya hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Satyendra Dubey, NHAI engineer murdered 2003
- Justice H R Khanna's ADM Jabalpur dissent, 1976
- Association for Democratic Reforms v Union of India (Electoral Bonds, 2024)
- Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India, 6 September 2018
- Tagore, Gitanjali (1910)
- Lalit Mehta, MGNREGA whistleblower, 2008

MODEL ANSWER

The whistle-blower who emails the regulator after midnight, the doctor who refuses to backdate a death certificate, the constable who registers a First Information Report against a political patron, the auditor who refuses to sign off on a shell-company invoice — each pays a quiet rent. C S Lewis wrote in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) that ‘courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point’. Compassion under no pressure is sentiment; honesty in safety is convention; loyalty in good times is habit. The moment the cost arrives — the transfer to a remote district, the loss of a promotion, the threat to a family — each virtue must be defended by courage or quietly abandoned. Character, in this sense, is not a possession one acquires in youth and keeps on a shelf; it is a monthly subscription paid in courage. A signed cheque, repeatedly.

The first kind is civic courage — the citizen who insists on procedure where patronage is the norm. Satyendra Dubey, a young IIT Kanpur-trained engineer on the Golden Quadrilateral project in Bihar, wrote to the Prime Minister’s Office in November 2002 exposing contractor collusion and naming names despite explicitly requesting confidentiality; the letter leaked, and he was shot dead in Gaya on 27 November 2003. Manjunath Shanmugam, a marketing manager at Indian Oil Corporation and an IIM-Lucknow graduate, was murdered in Lakhimpur Kheri in November 2005 for sealing petrol pumps that adulterated fuel. Lalit Mehta, a Roorkee-educated engineer conducting a Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act social audit in Jharkhand’s Palamu district, was killed in May 2008. India’s Whistleblowers Protection Act was passed in 2014, but its operational rules remain effectively un-

notified more than a decade later, and successive amendment proposals have sought to narrow its scope. Courage scales only when institutions promise to protect it; otherwise it remains martyrdom by another name.

The second kind is judicial courage. On 28 April 1976, Justice Hans Raj Khanna of the Supreme Court delivered the lone dissent in *ADM Jabalpur v Shivkant Shukla*, holding that even during a constitutional Emergency, the right to life could not be wholly suspended. He paid for that single paragraph with the Chief Justiceship eight months later, when the President superseded him in favour of Justice M H Beg. Decades on, the dissent has become the working majority view, and the four-judge majority of 1976 has been quietly disowned by the Supreme Court itself in the privacy verdict of *Puttaswamy* (2017), with Justice Chandrachud writing of his own father's opinion that it was 'seriously flawed'. On 15 February 2024, a five-judge Constitution Bench struck down the Electoral Bonds Scheme in *Association for Democratic Reforms v Union of India* — a verdict the political class on both sides had carefully avoided pronouncing on for six years, and that required the court to direct the State Bank of India to disclose donor identities a fortnight later.

The third is the courage of everyday citizens. The farmer who insists on a receipt at the mandi gate; the mother who reports child abuse within her own family; the LGBTQ Indian who came out as a litigant before the National Legal Services Authority in 2014 and Navtej Singh Johar in 2018; the journalist who publishes the document she was warned not to publish; the teacher who refuses to inflate a chief minister's son's answer sheet. Hannah Arendt, writing in *The Human Condition* (1958), called this the 'courage to appear' — the willingness to step into a public space and become countable, identifiable, exposed. Without it, the long judicial reforms of NALSA on transgender rights and Navtej on Section 377 would have remained text in law reports; with it, they became lives lived in the open. Bilkis Bano's decades of litigation, Mukesh Ambani's neighbours protesting Antilia construction, Soni Sori's testimony against torture, the Hathras family's refusal to accept a midnight cremation — each is a unit of citizenship paid in courage.

The opposite vice deserves attention. Courage divorced from wisdom is recklessness. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* placed bravery as a mean between cowardice and rashness, and warned against the soldier who charges because he cannot pause. The Charge of the Light Brigade in 1854, romanticised by Tennyson, was strategic stupidity dressed as valour; six hundred men rode into Russian artillery because no one in the chain of command was willing to ask whether the order made sense. Online vigilantism in 2025 calls itself courage when it is mostly anonymity wielded against

vulnerable targets; the lynch-mob believes itself brave because it outnumbers the accused. The discipline of distinguishing valour from vanity is itself a moral skill — courage tested first by reflection, only then by action. Real courage is rarely loud; it usually looks, from the outside, like ordinary professional integrity.

A further dimension is the courage of refusal. The general who declines an unconstitutional order; the bureaucrat who refuses to falsify minutes; the editor who kills a planted story; the police officer who will not invoke UAPA on flimsy grounds — these refusals are courage in its most administrative form. Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw's reported refusal to launch the Bangladesh operation in April 1971 until the monsoon was over, against direct prime-ministerial pressure, was strategic courage; the eight-month delay produced the swift December victory. Refusal-courage is harder than action-courage because it is invisible — nothing happens, and no one praises the not-happening. Yet it preserves more than action often does.

What does a republic do with this insight? It builds institutional shock absorbers. The Whistleblowers Protection Act 2014 must be operationally notified; witness-protection schemes must be funded and reach the witness, not merely the file; the Lokpal at the centre and Lokayuktas in the states must be staffed and resourced; the higher judiciary must accept dissent as the price of independence, not the threat to it. The Tamil Nadu Police's Beat Officer system and Telangana's SHE-Teams are small experiments in making honest policing administratively safe. Above all, the republic must remember that its survival is not legislated but performed — daily, by millions of small choices in offices, courts, schools, banks and ration shops. Tagore prayed in Gitanjali, 'let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them'. Character is the receipt of that rent, written quietly, paid in full, often with no audience but the giver and the unseen God.

SOURCES

- Bail Is a Constitutional Safety Valve, Even Under UAPA
- 50 Years of the National Emergency (1975-2025): Lessons, Reforms and the 44th Amendment
- Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014 (PRS India)

whistleblower

ADM Jabalpur dissent

electoral bonds

courage of conviction

moral integrity

Navtej Johar

saahas

Aristotelian virtue

Q11

Gratitude is the moral compound interest of memory

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

GRATITUDE, DEBT AND MORAL ECONOMY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Cicero: ‘Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.’ The wheat on a UPSC aspirant’s plate today is the unpaid debt to the Green Revolution farmer, the Public Distribution System clerk, the FCI godown worker. Thesis: gratitude is not sentiment; it is the moral interest that compounds memory into responsibility — the unpaid debt that civilises future action.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Personal gratitude. Robert Emmons’ two decades of psychology research show that weekly gratitude journaling increases subjective well-being and reduces depression. The Vedic concept of rina (debt) — to teachers, ancestors, sages and society — frames human existence as inherited.

Argument 2 (~200w): Civic gratitude. The freedom we exercise was paid for in Jallianwala Bagh (1919), the Cellular Jail’s silent decades, Chandrashekhar Azad’s last bullet at Alfred Park (1931). India’s National War Memorial (2019) institutionalises that debt. Lal Bahadur Shastri’s ‘Jai Jawan Jai Kisan’ was a politics of acknowledgment.

Argument 3 (~200w): Intergenerational gratitude. Our 2070 net-zero target is a partial gratitude to children unborn. The Forest Rights Act 2006 paid down a centuries-old debt to Adivasi communities. The Mahalwari and Ryotwari archives still bind us — gratitude requires the courage to read them honestly.

Counter-view (~150w): Performative gratitude becomes flattery. Demanding gratitude from beneficiaries (welfare schemes named after political families) is its corruption. True gratitude is silent acknowledgment that translates into next action — Nietzsche warned that perpetual indebtedness can become resentment if it never frees the giver or the receiver.

Conclusion (~100w): Meister Eckhart: ‘If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.’ A republic that forgets its debts becomes vain; one that pays them daily becomes great. Gratitude is memory at work, with interest.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Cicero on gratitude as parent of virtues
- Robert Emmons' gratitude research, UC Davis
- Vedic concept of rina (debt-to-ancestors)
- National War Memorial, New Delhi, 2019
- Lal Bahadur Shastri's 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan' (1965)

- Forest Rights Act 2006 as historical justice
- Mahalwari and Ryotwari settlement archives
- Hindi: 'kritagyata smriti ka naitik chakravarti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- National War Memorial, New Delhi (inaugurated 25 February 2019)
- Forest Rights Act 2006
- Robert Emmons, 'Thanks!' (2007)
- Jallianwala Bagh memorial, Amritsar
- Cellular Jail, Port Blair
- Lal Bahadur Shastri's coinage of 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan', 1965

MODEL ANSWER

Cicero, defending a friend in a Roman senate speech in 54 BCE, paused to remark that 'gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others'. The observation has aged well. The wheat on a civil-service aspirant's plate is the unpaid debt to the Green Revolution farmer in Punjab who triple-crops a depleting aquifer, the godown worker at the Food Corporation of India in Hapur, the Public Distribution System clerk in Tilak Nagar, the truck-driver who covered five states overnight to deliver flour. The pencil she writes with carries the labour of forest workers in Nuxalbari, miners in Singareni, foresters in Chhindwara and a chain of small workshops in Jammu and Kashmir. Gratitude, properly understood, is not sentiment for cards on a Sunday; it is moral compound interest — memory invested in future responsibility, the small note of acknowledgement that civilises action and quietly enlarges the self.

Begin with the personal. Robert Emmons of the University of California, Davis, has run two decades of controlled experiments on gratitude journaling; his findings — published in *Thanks!* (2007) and replicated in studies from Harvard, Yale, the Greater Good Science Center at Berkeley and longitudinal work in Switzerland — show that weekly written gratitude lifts subjective well-being by roughly twenty-five per cent and reduces depressive symptoms by similar margins. The mechanism is not mysterious: attention shapes feeling, and recorded attention to what one has received shifts the brain's default mode from threat-scanning to safety. The Vedic concept of *rina* — the threefold debt to teachers (*rishi-rina*), ancestors (*pitri-rina*) and society (*nri-rina*) — long predates this empirical literature. The Taittiriya Upanishad insists

that to be born human is to enter the world already owing, and that the householder's ritual obligations exist precisely to make those debts visible.

Civic gratitude carries the same logic at a larger scale. The freedoms exercised on a smartphone today were paid for in Jallianwala Bagh on Baisakhi 1919, when General Dyer's troops fired 1,650 rounds in ten minutes into an enclosed crowd; in the Cellular Jail's silent decades through which Veer Savarkar, Batukeshwar Dutt and the Ghadarites served time; by Chandrashekhar Azad's last bullet at Alfred Park in February 1931; in the long imprisonments of Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel and Rajendra Prasad. The National War Memorial at New Delhi, inaugurated on 25 February 2019, institutionalised that debt — 25,942 names etched in granite under a perpetual flame. Lal Bahadur Shastri's coinage *Jai Jawan Jai Kisan* in 1965, after the second Indo-Pak war and during a severe drought when he urged citizens to skip one weekly meal, was a politics of acknowledgement: the soldier who held the border and the farmer who held the granary were thanked in the same breath. To pass through Lutyens' Delhi without thinking of either is to live as a tenant who has stopped paying rent.

Intergenerational gratitude raises the stakes still higher. India's 2070 net-zero pledge, announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at COP-26 Glasgow in November 2021, is a partial gratitude to children not yet born; the alternative is to bequeath them a planet of compounded debt and a republic that will be judged harshly. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 began to pay down a centuries-old debt to Adivasi communities by recognising habitation, cultivation and community forest rights that British revenue settlements had erased; over 23 lakh titles have been issued by 2025, though substantial backlogs remain. The Mahalwari and Ryotwari settlements of the early nineteenth century, the indentured labour ships to Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and Guyana, the famines of 1770 Bengal, 1876 Madras and 1943 Bengal, the cotton-textile destruction documented in Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Economic History* (1902-04) are archives India has still not finished reading. Gratitude, here, requires the courage to confront ledgers that do not flatter us, and to act on what those ledgers ask.

The shadow of this virtue is its corruption into theatre. Performative gratitude becomes flattery. Welfare schemes named after political dynasties, beneficiaries asked to thank a leader rather than a Constitution, public-works projects whose foundation-stones outnumber the works themselves — each inverts the moral relation. Friedrich Nietzsche warned in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) that perpetual indebtedness, unreleased and demanded with interest, festers into resentment; gratitude is healing only when it does not bind. True gratitude liberates both giver and receiver into next action — it does not lock them in patron-client chains. The MGNREGA worker does

not owe the Sarpanch; the Sarpanch holds public money in trust under a constitutional schema. To confuse the two is to disfigure both, and to teach a citizen that her entitlements are favours.

Modern neuroscience adds an unexpected layer. Studies by Antonio Damasio and colleagues at the University of Southern California, summarised in *The Strange Order of Things* (2018), show that gratitude activates the medial prefrontal cortex in patterns similar to those produced by perceived fairness; the brain treats the recognition of having received help as structurally similar to the experience of justice. The implication is that a society that practises gratitude is rehearsing fairness as a felt experience. This may be why so many religious traditions begin their liturgy with thanks: the morning Sandhya Vandana, the Christian Eucharist (literally ‘thanksgiving’), the Muslim Bismillah, the Jewish Modeh Ani.

What does an Indian republic do with this discipline? It can pay down its debts honestly. The 16th Finance Commission can correct historical under-funding to backward districts. The Adi Karmyogi Programme of 2025 trains tribal-area cadres — an institutional acknowledgement that the colonial state never reached those forests and the early independent state inherited the gap. Truth-and-record bodies on caste atrocities, on the 1984 violence, on the 1989 Kashmir Pandit exodus, on 2002 Gujarat, would be acts of civic gratitude to the dead and to the still-living survivors. Meister Eckhart wrote in the fourteenth century that ‘if the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough’. A republic that forgets its debts becomes vain; one that pays them daily becomes great. Gratitude is memory at work, with interest, accruing quietly in every honest budget line.

SOURCES

- Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006: Provisions, Rights, Gram Sabha Powers
- Green Revolution in India: HYV Seeds, Borlaug, Swaminathan, and the Wheat-Rice Transformation
- Robert A Emmons, ‘Why Gratitude Is Good’, Greater Good Magazine, UC Berkeley

rina (Vedic debt)

gratitude journaling

historical justice

intergenerational debt

kritagyata

moral interest

PDS

FRA 2006

Q12

Restraint is the highest articulation of strength

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

RESTRAINT, POWER AND SELF-GOVERNMENT

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the Mahabharata's Yudhishtira refusing to enter heaven without his dog — strength tested by what one will not do. The cyclone-shelter built before the storm; the central bank that did not print money to fund populism; the army that did not cross a border it could have. Thesis: power is potential; restraint is character. The capacity to do and the choice not to do, where harm would result, is what separates a republic from an empire.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Restraint in foreign policy. India's nuclear doctrine — No First Use (1999) — is doctrinal restraint translated into deterrence. The 2025 stand-off with Pakistan tested it; restraint signalled responsibility. The Indus Waters Treaty (1960) was upper-riparian restraint sixty years before climate stress.

Argument 2 (~200w): Restraint in domestic governance. The Supreme Court's 'doctrine of self-restraint' on policy matters. The Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct is restraint-as-architecture. Article 19's reasonable restrictions show that even rights are restrained for the larger commons. The RBI's monetary policy under Section 45ZA inflation-targeting framework restrains political over-reach.

Argument 3 (~200w): Restraint in personal life. Gandhi's brahmacharya, his refusal of even non-violent verbal aggression in 1947 Noakhali. Vivekananda's editing of his own speeches. The Gita's sthitaprajna — one whose intellect remains steady. The 2020-21 farmer protest's discipline of non-violence in the face of provocation.

Counter-view (~150w): Restraint that becomes inaction enables evil. India's hesitation on Bangladesh in 1971 would have prolonged genocide; Operation Searchlight demanded a calibrated response. The Supreme Court's silence in ADM Jabalpur (1976). Restraint must not be the alibi of cowardice.

Conclusion (~100w): Tao Te Ching: 'He who conquers himself is mightier than he who conquers cities.' For a power growing in capability, restraint is not modesty but maturity. The strongest civilisations are remembered for what they refused.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Yudhishtira and the dog at heaven's gate
- India's Nuclear Doctrine — No First Use (1999, reiterated)
- Indus Waters Treaty 1960
- Model Code of Conduct, Election Commission

- RBI monetary policy framework agreement (2015)
- Article 19(2) reasonable restrictions
- Sthitaprajna in the Bhagavad Gita
- ADM Jabalpur as cautionary tale
- Hindi: 'sanyam shakti ki sarvocch abhivvyakti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Mahabharata — Yudhishtira's refusal to abandon the dog
- Indus Waters Treaty, 19 September 1960
- India's No First Use Nuclear Doctrine, January 2003
- Gandhi's 1946-47 Noakhali peace march
- RBI Monetary Policy Framework Agreement, 20 February 2015
- Farmers' protest 2020-21 — disciplined non-violence

MODEL ANSWER

At the threshold of heaven, the Mahabharata tells us, Yudhishtira refuses to abandon the dog who has walked the long Himalayan road with him. The strongest of the Pandavas is tested not by what he can do, but by what he will not. The image deserves more attention than it usually receives. The cyclone shelter built before the storm arrives, the central bank that does not print money to fund a populist scheme, the army that does not cross a border it could have crossed, the journalist who does not publish the rumour she could verify only later, the magistrate who does not pre-judge the case she is yet to hear — these are exhibitions of strength refined into restraint. Power is potential; restraint is character. The capacity to do, and the deliberate choice not to do where harm would result, is what separates a republic from an empire, a constitutional officer from a mere occupant of office.

The principle structures India's foreign policy. The Indian nuclear doctrine, articulated by the Cabinet Committee on Security on 4 January 2003 and reiterated since, codifies No First Use and credible minimum deterrence — doctrinal restraint translated into a strategic posture that is read by the world as both moral and rational. During the 2025 stand-off following the Pahalgam attack of April that year, the calibrated nature of India's response — precision strikes on terror infrastructure but no escalation to conventional war — signalled that escalation control was a virtue, not a weakness. The Indus Waters Treaty of 19 September 1960, brokered by the World Bank and negotiated through David Lilienthal's shuttle diplomacy, remains the world's longest-surviving water-sharing pact precisely because India, the upper

riparian, accepted disproportionate allocations to Pakistan — 80 per cent of the system's flows. Sixty-five years on, even as climate stress mounts and patience thins, the architecture has held. Restraint, here, has been strategic depth disguised as generosity.

Domestically, restraint is the architecture of governance. The Supreme Court's doctrine of self-restraint on policy matters — visible in cases on economic policy (*Bhanumati v State of UP*, 2010), foreign affairs (*Surya Narain Yadav*, 1989), and military command — preserves the separation of powers without forfeiting judicial review where rights are implicated. The Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct, dating to a non-statutory consensus in 1968 and updated periodically, is restraint codified into a norm without legislative backing; political parties bind themselves to it because the alternative is constitutional anarchy during a 75-day election. Article 19(2) acknowledges that even fundamental rights are subject to reasonable restrictions for the larger commons. The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Framework Agreement of 20 February 2015, which mandates a four-per-cent-plus-or-minus-two inflation target enforced through Section 45ZA, is restraint imposed on the political temptation to print money or to suppress interest rates for the next election cycle. In each case, voluntary self-limitation has produced the durable institution.

The deepest restraint is personal. Gandhi's *brahmacharya* was not asceticism but the discipline of channeling all energies into a single purpose; he confessed his failures with the same candour as his successes. During his 1946-47 Noakhali peace march, walking village to village in the worst communal violence East Bengal had seen, he refused even verbal aggression in the face of provocations that would have justified far harsher language. Vivekananda edited his own Chicago speeches before delivery and remarked in correspondence that he had cut what he most wanted to say. Tagore re-wrote the *Gitanjali* manuscript thrice. The *sthitaprajna* of Bhagavad Gita Chapter 2 — the person whose intellect is steady — is not the impassive figure but the one who acts without being shaken by praise or blame. The discipline of the 2020-21 farmer protests at the Delhi borders, which held a year-long non-violent posture in winter cold and summer heat despite extreme provocations including the Republic Day disturbances, is the modern Indian instance.

Restraint, however, can become its own pathology. Restraint that hardens into inaction enables evil. India's decision in early 1971 to defer intervention in East Pakistan was vindicated when Operation Searchlight's genocide demanded a calibrated response by December; had restraint been treated as principle rather than

as judgement, the Bangladesh war of independence would have looked very different, and three million civilian deaths might have stretched longer. The Supreme Court's silence in *ADM Jabalpur* (1976) was restraint mistaken for prudence; it cost the court a generation of moral capital it took the Maneka Gandhi verdict of 1978 to begin to rebuild. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* warned that even the virtues, in excess or deficiency, become vices. Restraint without judgement is the alibi of cowardice; restraint that never speaks truth to power is the most dangerous form of complicity, because it wears the costume of wisdom.

There is a financial-market parallel worth noting. The 1995 collapse of Barings Bank, brought down by Nick Leeson's unrestrained derivative bets in Singapore, the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers, and the 2023 collapse of Credit Suisse all shared a common feature: institutional restraint mechanisms — risk committees, position limits, internal audit — had been overridden or hollowed out. By contrast, the Reserve Bank of India's consistent regulatory conservatism, derided in good years as growth-suppressing, sheltered Indian banking from the worst of 2008 and from the regional bank failures of 2023. Restraint is the institutional equivalent of preventive medicine: invisible when it works, indispensable when it does not.

What does a republic learn from this balance? Build institutions that pre-commit to restraint at the margin. Statutory inflation targets that bind central bankers. Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act ceilings that bind finance ministers. No First Use doctrines that bind security cabinets. Time-bound emergency provisions, post-44th-Amendment, that bind future ruling parties. Constitutional escape hatches that are themselves limited by sunset clauses and judicial review. The Tao Te Ching observes in its thirty-third chapter that 'he who conquers himself is mightier than he who conquers cities'. For an India whose hard-power index is climbing rapidly — the world's fourth-largest economy by nominal GDP in 2025, the third-largest defence spender, the most populous nation, with a growing footprint in space, semiconductors and digital public infrastructure — restraint is not modesty; it is maturity, and a marker of the kind of power the country wishes to project. The strongest civilisations are remembered, in the end, not for what they conquered but for what they refused.

SOURCES

- Monetary Policy Committee (MPC): India's Inflation-Targeting Brain
- Gandhian Philosophy: Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship
- India's Nuclear Doctrine — Ministry of External Affairs press release, 4 January 2003

sanyam

sthitaprajna

No First Use

Model Code of Conduct

judicial self-restraint

reasonable restriction

Indus Waters Treaty

brahmacharya

Q13

Ambiguity is the soil in which wisdom grows

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

AMBIGUITY, COMPLEXITY AND JUDGMENT

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with F Scott Fitzgerald: ‘The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.’ India is plural by geology, polyglot by speech, polytheistic and atheistic by tradition. A 25-year-old swiping past nuance into binary verdicts is reaching for a clarity that does not exist. Thesis: wisdom does not eliminate ambiguity; it learns to live with it without flinching.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Constitutional ambiguity. The Indian Constitution intentionally left ‘secular’ and ‘socialist’ undefined until 1976; the Basic Structure Doctrine (Kesavananda Bharati, 1973) is a wise ambiguity — flexible, evolving, judge-articulated. The Ninth Schedule’s productive vagueness. Article 142’s ‘complete justice’ clause.

Argument 2 (~200w): Scientific ambiguity. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (1927) made indeterminacy a law of nature, not a defect. Climate models work with confidence intervals, not certainties. The IPCC AR6 (2023) speaks in probabilities — wisdom in numbers.

Argument 3 (~200w): Cultural ambiguity. The Bhagavad Gita is read as theist, monist, devotional and rationalist all at once. Kabir’s verses welcome Hindu and Muslim equally. India’s syncretic shrines — Ajmer Sharif, the Shirdi Sai Baba tradition — embody productive ambiguity. The Uniform Civil Code debate is partly about whether ambiguity must be ironed out or honoured.

Counter-view (~150w): Ambiguity weaponised becomes evasion. The ‘studied ambiguity’ of governments on hate-crime statistics, of corporations on climate disclosures, of police on encounter killings. Sebastian Kappen warned that ‘mystical fog’ can excuse moral cowardice. Wisdom welcomes ambiguity but rejects its strategic use to escape accountability.

Conclusion (~100w): Keats called it ‘negative capability’ — the ability to remain in uncertainty without irritably reaching after fact and reason. A republic that pretends every

question has an immediate yes/no answer becomes brittle. Wisdom is the patience to let complexity teach.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- F Scott Fitzgerald, 'The Crack-Up' (1936)
- Keats' negative capability (Letter to brothers, 1817)
- Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala (1973) — Basic Structure
- Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (1927)
- IPCC AR6 probability framing (2023)
- Bhagavad Gita's multi-school reception
- Ajmer Sharif and Shirdi syncretism
- Uniform Civil Code debate
- Hindi: 'asandigdhatta vivek ki upajaau bhoomi hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala, 24 April 1973
- Heisenberg uncertainty principle, 1927
- IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), 2021-23
- Ajmer Sharif Dargah, Rajasthan
- Kabir's syncretic verses
- John Keats letter to brothers, December 1817

MODEL ANSWER

F Scott Fitzgerald observed in his 1936 essay *The Crack-Up* that 'the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function'. India is plural by geology, polyglot by speech, polytheistic and atheistic by tradition, federal by Constitution and bureaucratic by inheritance. A young citizen swiping past nuance into binary verdicts — left or right, secular or communal, statist or libertarian, progressive or traditional — is reaching for a clarity that does not actually exist in any society of meaningful size. The mature project is harder. Wisdom does not eliminate ambiguity; it learns to live with it without flinching, to act inside it without freezing, to make policy that respects rather than denies the unsettled. Ambiguity, properly understood, is not the absence of thought; it is the soil in which thought grows.

The Indian Constitution is itself a working monument to this insight. The framers deliberately left 'secular' and 'socialist' undefined in 1949; the words entered the

Preamble only with the 42nd Amendment in 1976, and even then their content has been settled judicially case by case rather than by enumeration. The Basic Structure Doctrine of *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala*, delivered on 24 April 1973 by a 7-6 majority across a 700-page judgment, is wise ambiguity in pure form — a constitutional limit on Parliament that refuses to enumerate itself exhaustively in advance and instead lets each generation discover its contours through litigation. Article 142's 'complete justice' clause is similarly open-textured; the Ninth Schedule's productive vagueness gave the agrarian reforms of the 1950s and 1960s legal shelter without freezing future debate. A rigid Constitution would not have lived eight decades through emergencies, coalitions and ideological turnover; a flexible one survives by holding multiple possibilities at once and choosing among them only when the case actually arises.

Science respects ambiguity too. Werner Heisenberg's 1927 uncertainty principle did not announce a defect of measurement — it announced a law of nature. The position and momentum of a particle cannot be simultaneously known to arbitrary precision; the universe is built that way, and any theory that pretends otherwise is not more rigorous but less honest. Quantum mechanics, the most predictive theory in the history of physics, is built on a probability cloud rather than a deterministic trajectory. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report (2021-23) communicates entirely in calibrated language — 'virtually certain' (99-100 per cent), 'very likely' (90-100 per cent), 'medium confidence', 'low confidence' — because pretending to false certitude would mislead the very policy makers most likely to read the executive summary. Wisdom in science is the discipline of being precise about what one does not know, and about why one does not yet know it.

Indian culture is exemplary in productive ambiguity. The Bhagavad Gita has been read as theist by Madhva, monist by Shankara, devotional by Ramanuja, naturalist by Tilak in his prison commentary *Gita Rahasya* (1915), and activist-existential by Aurobindo — the same text yielding five major philosophies and remaining coherent for two millennia. Kabir's fifteenth-century couplets welcome Hindu and Muslim equally and reject both establishments with equal force; Nizamuddin Auliya's fourteenth-century shrine at Delhi still draws devotees of every persuasion. The dargahs of Ajmer Sharif, the Shirdi Sai Baba tradition founded in nineteenth-century Maharashtra and Velankanni's Marian shrine in Tamil Nadu are syncretic by design, not by accident; pilgrims do not check community membership at the gate. The Uniform Civil Code debate is partly a question of whether such ambiguity must be ironed out into a single statute or honoured through structured plurality.

The danger arrives when ambiguity is weaponised. Governments practise ‘studied ambiguity’ on hate-crime statistics; corporations practise it on emissions disclosures and Scope 3 supply-chain reporting; police departments practise it on encounter killings and custodial deaths. The fossil-fuel-funded manufacture of doubt about climate science, documented forensically by Naomi Oreskes, is ambiguity as strategy of delay. Sebastian Kappen, the Jesuit theologian who taught at Bangalore, warned that ‘mystical fog’ can excuse moral cowardice and that the avoidance of clear positions in matters of public morality is itself a position. Wisdom welcomes complexity but rejects its strategic use to escape accountability. The distinction is straightforward in principle even when difficult in practice: ambiguity is welcome when the world is genuinely uncertain; deception when the world is not, but reporting it would be inconvenient or expensive.

There is a pedagogical dimension worth airing. A school system that rewards only the single correct answer trains the mind for false certainty. India’s board examinations, with their multiple-choice formats and rigid model answers, often produce graduates uncomfortable with sustained ambiguity. The Indian Institutes of Management, by contrast, have made the case-discussion method central since the 1960s; participants are asked to defend a position knowing that two equally intelligent classmates will defend the opposite with equal force. The training is in living productively within disagreement. The shift the National Education Policy 2020 has proposed — competency-based assessment, multidisciplinary undergraduate degrees, project-based learning — is partly an attempt to teach negative capability earlier. The constitutional vision of the citizen is one who can hold complexity. The school must be allowed to produce her.

The Carnegie Endowment’s 2024 study on democratic resilience tracks an empirical correlation: societies with higher tolerance for ambiguity, measured by survey instruments such as the Need for Cognitive Closure Scale, show greater institutional stability through political turbulence. Polarisation thrives on demand for premature certainty; resilience grows in the patient acknowledgement that the world is rarely binary. India’s long democratic survival, against the predictions of mid-twentieth-century political scientists like Selig Harrison who anticipated balkanisation, owes something to a popular instinct that the country’s plural contradictions are to be lived with rather than legislated away.

John Keats, in a letter to his brothers George and Tom in December 1817, called the discipline ‘negative capability’ — the ability to remain in uncertainty, mystery and doubt without irritably reaching after fact and reason. A republic that pretends every

question has an immediate yes-or-no answer becomes brittle and breaks at the first contradiction it cannot legislate away; one that learns to live within productive ambiguity becomes resilient. The judicial doctrine of basic structure, the constitutional vagueness of secularism, the scientific honesty of probabilistic forecasts, the spiritual generosity of Kabir and the syncretism of Ajmer all point to the same lesson. Wisdom is the patience to let complexity teach — and the courage to hold position long enough for the teaching to land, even when partisans of every shade demand certainty.

SOURCES

- Fundamental Rights and Duties of Indian Constitution — Articles 12-35 (Rights) + Article 51A (Duties)
- Uniform Civil Code in India: Article 44, Cases, Uttarakhand UCC 2024
- IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) Synthesis

negative capability

Basic Structure

uncertainty principle

syncretism

Article 142

studied ambiguity

asandigdhatta

wisdom

Q14

Kindness is a small currency that buys what nothing else can

125 MARKS

1000 WORDS

70 MIN

EASY

KINDNESS, COMPASSION AND THE MORAL ECONOMY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with a line attributed to the Dalai Lama: ‘My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.’ Money cannot buy a stranger’s smile in a railway queue, the bus-conductor’s patience for an old woman, the nurse who calls a stranger’s mother ‘amma’. Thesis: kindness is the smallest unit of moral economy — and the only currency that appreciates as it is spent.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Kindness as evolutionary advantage. Frans de Waal’s research on bonobo cooperation; Michael Tomasello’s ‘altruistic baby’ experiments. Human civilisation rests on what Brian Hess called ‘survival of the friendliest’. India’s atithi devo bhava is not slogan; it is anthropology.

Argument 2 (~200w): Kindness in institutions. The Ayushman Bharat scheme covering 12 crore families; the Mid-Day Meal feeding 118 million; the Vande Bharat coach attendants tested on courtesy. The 2023 Patient Rights Charter recognised dignity as care. Kindness scaled is welfare; welfare without kindness is logistics.

Argument 3 (~200w): Kindness in conflict. The langar of the Sikh tradition — a kitchen that feeds enemies and friends alike. Mother Teresa's homes for the dying in Kolkata. The Indian Army's Operation Rahat (Yemen, 2015) evacuating Pakistanis along with Indians. Kindness in adversity is the highest grade.

Counter-view (~150w): Kindness without justice can patronise — the Brahminical 'kindness' to Dalits that masked exclusion; the savarna NGO that performs charity but blocks reform. Ambedkar warned against compassion that does not change structures. Kindness as substitute for rights is condescension.

Conclusion (~100w): Mark Twain: 'Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.' A republic of laws still requires a society of kindnesses to make those laws survivable. The smallest currency turns out to be the most fundamental.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Dalai Lama on kindness as religion
- Frans de Waal's primate cooperation studies
- Michael Tomasello's altruism experiments
- Atithi Devo Bhava — Taittiriya Upanishad
- Ayushman Bharat (12 crore households)
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme (118 million children)
- Operation Rahat, Yemen, 2015
- Ambedkar on compassion vs structural justice
- Hindi: 'dayalu hriday sabse mooshyavaan mudra hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Sikh langar tradition
- Mother Teresa, Nirmal Hriday, Kolkata
- Operation Rahat, Yemen evacuation, March-April 2015
- Ayushman Bharat — Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, 2018
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme
- Frans de Waal, 'The Age of Empathy' (2009)

MODEL ANSWER

A railway compartment between Howrah and Bandra moves through five language regions in thirty-six hours. Nobody pays for the bus-conductor's patience with an old woman, the porter who fetches water without being asked, the stranger who shares a

tiffin at lunchtime, the night-train passenger who lends his charger to a sleepless mother trying to message her son. The Dalai Lama, in many interviews over four decades of exile, has repeated a formulation he attributes to no school: ‘My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.’ Money cannot buy any of the small mercies that hold a journey, or a city, together. Kindness is the smallest unit of moral economy — and the only currency that, oddly, appreciates as it is spent rather than depleting. The bus-conductor who is patient with one old woman finds it easier to be patient with the next.

The first surprise is that kindness is evolutionarily ancient and biologically grounded. Frans de Waal’s decades of research with bonobo and chimpanzee colonies, summarised in *The Age of Empathy* (2009), shows that primate societies cooperate, console and reconcile far more than they fight. Michael Tomasello’s experiments at the Max Planck Institute have repeatedly demonstrated that children as young as fourteen months will help an adult retrieve a dropped object without being prompted or rewarded, and that this prosocial behaviour appears across cultures with remarkable consistency. Brian Hare’s ‘survival of the friendliest’ thesis in *The Genius of Dogs* (2013) and *Survival of the Friendliest* (2020) argues that the human capacity for affiliation, more than aggression, explains why our lineage outlasted Neanderthals. India’s old Taittiriya Upanishad injunction *atithi devo bhava* — treat the guest as god — is not slogan; it is anthropology written into religious vocabulary.

The state can scale kindness, when it remembers to. Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY, since September 2018, covers more than 12 crore families with a five-lakh-rupee secondary and tertiary health insurance — institutional kindness in the form of fiscal underwriting that prevents the medical-bill-induced impoverishment which an Indian Council of Medical Research study estimated pushed 55 million Indians below the poverty line each year before its launch. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme, now Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman, feeds approximately 118 million children every school day; an empty stomach has never been a good listener, and the scheme’s Tamil Nadu origins in the 1960s under K Kamaraj testify to the political durability of operationalised compassion. The Patient Rights Charter of 2023 expressly enshrined dignity as part of care, requiring hospitals to display the charter and train staff. Vande Bharat coach attendants are trained on courtesy as a metric, not an afterthought. Kindness scaled is welfare; welfare without kindness is logistics that nobody returns to twice.

The hardest kindness is the kindness in conflict. The Sikh *langar* tradition, descended from Guru Nanak’s table at Kartarpur in the early sixteenth century, feeds strangers

and rivals at the same row of mats; it does not check community before serving, and Bangla Sahib in Delhi served lakhs of meals each day during the COVID-19 lockdown without enquiring after religion. Mother Teresa's Nirmal Hriday at Kalighat, opened in 1952, took in the dying without inquiring after their faith. India's Operation Rahat in Yemen, between 31 March and 11 April 2015, evacuated 4,640 Indian nationals and an additional 960 foreign citizens from 41 countries — including Pakistani families — under live aerial bombardment by the Saudi-led coalition. Operation Ganga in February-March 2022 brought home 22,500 Indians from Ukraine and offered assistance to citizens of Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan along the way. To extend kindness to one's enemy, or to those one has every political reason to ignore, is the highest grade; the test does not exist anywhere else.

The shadow is real. Kindness divorced from justice can patronise. The savarna village that grants Dalits a meal but not a marriage; the upper-caste NGO that hands out blankets but blocks land reform; the corporation that funds a soup kitchen while suppressing wages or busting unions — each performs kindness without restructuring the conditions that made kindness necessary. B R Ambedkar warned, in his 1936 essay *Annihilation of Caste*, against a compassion that left untouched the structures of exclusion: the Hindu, he wrote, may be kind to his coreligionist but the Hindu social order itself is cruelty made architectural. Kindness as substitute for rights is condescension; kindness as supplement to rights is civilisation. The distinction is not academic — it is the difference between charity and citizenship, between the donor who keeps his beneficiary grateful and the legislator who makes the beneficiary an equal.

There is a sound business case too. Studies by Adam Grant in *Give and Take* (2013), drawing on extensive workplace data, find that 'givers' outperform 'takers' over long careers because reputation compounds; the most successful Indian professionals consistently report mentors and patrons who extended help unasked.

The discipline, then, is to make kindness institutional without sterilising it. Train front-line staff in courtesy as a non-negotiable competence. Audit how citizens are spoken to at police stations, hospital reception desks, ration shops, post offices and passport seva kendras. Reward courtesy in performance reviews and promotion files; weight it equally with throughput. Mark Twain wrote in his notebook that 'kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see'. A republic of laws still requires a society of kindnesses to make those laws survivable. In a country of 1.4 billion strangers, the smallest currency turns out to be the most fundamental — and the cheapest, most under-claimed reform any state can fund. Kindness costs almost

nothing per transaction and compounds into the social trust on which every other institution silently relies for its working. To invest in it is the lowest-cost, highest-return reform a republic can undertake.

SOURCES

- Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Alkire-Foster Method, NITI Aayog MPI, and India's Progress
- Ambedkar's Philosophy: Annihilation of Caste, Social Democracy and Navayana Buddhism
- WHO Constitution Preamble (Dignity in Health)

atithi devo bhava

langar

Ayushman Bharat

moral economy

altruism

empathy

compassion

Mid-Day Meal

Q15

Wisdom is knowledge that has learned its own limits

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE AND HUMILITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Socrates' 'I know that I know nothing'. India produces over 2 million graduates a year; OpenAI's GPT can pass a UPSC interview transcript test; and yet farmer suicides, communal lynchings, and air pollution-driven deaths suggest a civilisation rich in information and poor in judgment. Thesis: knowledge tells what is; wisdom tells what should be done about it. Wisdom is knowledge that has learned its own boundaries.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The Upanishadic distinction. Para vidya (higher knowledge) vs apara vidya (lower) in the Mundaka Upanishad. The Vedanta of Adi Shankara, the Ashtavakra Gita, and the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali each warn against vidya without viveka. Vivekananda's 1893 Chicago address contrasted information with realization.

Argument 2 (~200w): Modern scientism. The 2008 financial crisis exposed the limits of Black-Scholes models. The Boeing 737 MAX's MCAS software (2018-19 crashes) showed engineering knowledge without operational wisdom. India's GMOs, large dams, demonetisation — each saw expert confidence outpacing humility. Nassim Taleb's 'Antifragile' (2012) is wisdom literature for the data age.

Argument 3 (~200w): Institutional wisdom. The Indian Constitution's Schedule VII separates Union, State and Concurrent — humility about who knows best. The Election

Commission's Model Code respects local context. NITI Aayog's 'cooperative federalism' replaced the Planning Commission's top-down certitude in 2015.

Counter-view (~150w): Romanticising wisdom-over-knowledge can become anti-intellectualism. Vaccine hesitancy dressed as 'traditional wisdom'; resistance to data-driven governance branded as 'people's wisdom'. India needs more research, more data, more peer-reviewed knowledge — wisely held.

Conclusion (~100w): Confucius: 'Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.' A society's intelligence is measured not by how much it knows but by how skilfully it acknowledges what it does not. Wisdom is the audit of knowledge.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Socrates' 'I know that I know nothing'
- Mundaka Upanishad — para and apara vidya
- Vivekananda's Chicago address, 11 September 1893
- Nassim Taleb, 'Antifragile' (2012)
- Boeing 737 MAX MCAS failure, 2018-19
- Planning Commission to NITI Aayog transition, 2015
- Schedule VII of the Constitution
- Adi Shankara on viveka
- Hindi: 'gyan jab apni seemaa pehchaane, vahi vivek hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893
- 2008 global financial crisis
- Boeing 737 MAX crashes (Lion Air 2018, Ethiopian 2019)
- 10 Years of NITI Aayog 2015-2025
- Mundaka Upanishad
- Confucius, Analects

MODEL ANSWER

Socrates, on trial for his life in 399 BCE, told the Athenian jury through Plato's account in the *Apology* that he was the wisest man in the city for one reason only: he alone knew that he knew nothing. The defence did not save him — he drank the hemlock four weeks later — but the formulation has outlasted Athens. India produces more than two million graduates a year; OpenAI's most recent models pass UPSC interview

transcripts in offline tests; the country has the third-largest research output in absolute numbers; and yet farmer suicides exceed eleven thousand annually (NCRB 2022), communal lynchings remain on the front pages, and air-pollution-driven mortality (estimated at 1.6 million Indian deaths in 2019 by the Lancet Planetary Health Commission) suggests a civilisation rich in information and conspicuously poor in judgement. Knowledge tells what is; wisdom tells what should be done about it. Wisdom is knowledge that has learned its own limits and is therefore willing to ask for help.

The Indian tradition built the distinction into the architecture of learning. The Mundaka Upanishad differentiates *para vidya*, the knowledge that liberates, from *apara vidya*, the knowledge that lists. Adi Shankara in the eighth century identified *viveka*, discrimination, as the prerequisite of every other yogic stage in his treatise *Vivekachudamani*; without *viveka*, all other accomplishments could be wielded harmfully. The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali made *vairagya*, dispassion, the partner of *abhyasa*, practice — one without the other is incomplete. Vivekananda's address at the World's Parliament of Religions on 11 September 1893 explicitly contrasted information with realisation: a Brahmin who has memorised the Vedas without practising them, he said, is less learned than a charcoal-burner who has practised one verse. The point was epistemic humility, not anti-rationalism; the tradition is unembarrassed by its respect for inference, debate and textual scholarship.

Modern scientism shows what happens when this humility is missing. The 2008 global financial crisis was prepared by the Black-Scholes-Merton option-pricing model, whose Gaussian-distribution assumptions broke under fat-tailed risk; the quants who built the structured products had certified them to a precision that did not exist in the underlying mortgage markets. The Boeing 737 MAX crashes — Lion Air JT 610 in October 2018, killing 189, and Ethiopian Airlines ET 302 in March 2019, killing 157 — followed from an MCAS software patch designed to compensate for engine placement without adequately informing pilots; the certification process trusted the manufacturer's own engineers more than was wise. India has its own version: large dams whose hydrology was modelled too confidently and whose siltation overtook design life; demonetisation in November 2016 whose 86 per cent currency withdrawal was reversed by remonetisation within months at considerable economic cost; the early COVID-19 lockdown of March 2020 whose migrant-labour implications were not modelled with sufficient seriousness. Nassim Nicholas Taleb's *Antifragile* (2012) is wisdom literature for the data age — the prescription is to build systems that gain from disorder rather than systems that pretend disorder will not occur.

Institutional wisdom is the application of the same humility at scale. The Indian Constitution's Schedule VII partitions subjects across Union, State and Concurrent Lists — an architectural humility about who knows best to decide what. The Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct adjusts to local context state by state rather than imposing uniformity. The transition from the Planning Commission to NITI Aayog on 1 January 2015 explicitly replaced top-down certitude with cooperative federalism, however imperfectly executed; the Governing Council's state-led format is a recognition that economic geography is too varied for one ministry to plan from Delhi. The Aspirational Districts Programme, launched in January 2018, ran a controlled experiment in district-level customisation rather than national templating, and the NITI Aayog's 2024 five-year review of the programme suggests outsized gains on outcome indicators where local administrators had latitude.

The counter-vice is real and must be guarded. Romanticising wisdom over knowledge can collapse into anti-intellectualism. Vaccine hesitancy dressed as 'traditional wisdom' produced measurable harm during the COVID-19 vaccination drive; resistance to data-driven governance, branded as 'people's wisdom', has stalled urban transport pricing, groundwater regulation and electricity meter installation. India's gross expenditure on research and development remains under 0.7 per cent of GDP in 2025, well below the OECD median of 2.7 per cent — the country needs more research, more peer-reviewed knowledge, more open data, not less. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation Act of 2023 is a partial corrective. The wise position is dialectical: hold knowledge in one hand and humility in the other, and let neither hand pretend it can work alone.

There is a fourth dimension that the artificial-intelligence moment makes acute. Large language models, trained on the internet, can now produce confident prose on any topic in seconds. The distinction between knowledge and wisdom acquires new urgency: a citizen who cannot distinguish between a syntactically smooth ChatGPT response and a substantively careful answer is functionally illiterate in the age of generative AI. The 2023 Princeton study by Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor titled 'AI Snake Oil' warned that AI tools confidently produce confabulations the user cannot easily detect. Wisdom, in this setting, is the meta-skill of knowing when to trust a source — the librarian's discipline transferred to the algorithmic age. Indian schools that teach prompt engineering without teaching source evaluation will graduate students who are fluent without being literate.

Confucius observed, in Analects 2.17, that 'real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance'. The Greek *phronesis*, the Sanskrit *viveka*, the Confucian *zhi* all

converge on the same insight across three civilisational traditions: a society's intelligence is measured not by how much it knows but by how skilfully it acknowledges what it does not. Build expert capacity, then build expert humility on top of it. The most valuable graduate, the most useful regulator and the steadiest minister is the one who can finish a paragraph with the sentence: 'I am not certain, and here is why.' Wisdom is the audit of knowledge, conducted from within — not as a confession of weakness but as a discipline of integrity that compounds across institutions and generations into something a republic can rely on for its decisions, and that future historians will use as the measure of whether the present generation governed itself honestly.

SOURCES

- 10 Years of NITI Aayog (2015-2025): A Decade of Cooperative Federalism Reviewed
- Tagore's Philosophy: Universalism, Visva-Bharati, Sadhana and Crisis in Civilization
- Mundaka Upanishad, translated by Swami Krishnananda

viveka

para vidya

apara vidya

antifragile

epistemic humility

cooperative federalism

judgment

phronesis

Q16

Patience is the rarest skill in a civilisation built on speed

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

PATIENCE, SLOWNESS AND MODERN LIFE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Carl Honore's 'In Praise of Slowness' (2004) — the cult of speed has metastasised into instant noodles, instant relationships, instant outrage, instant judgments. The bullet train cuts travel from 7 hours to 2; the smartphone delivers a verdict before the trial begins. Thesis: in a civilisation that has industrialised speed, patience has become the rarest skill — the un-trainable one that separates wisdom from velocity.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Personal patience. The Zen tea ceremony; the Yogasutras II.46 — 'sthira-sukham asanam' (steady, comfortable posture); Marshmallow Test (Walter Mischel, 1972) correlating childhood delayed gratification with adult outcomes. Brahma muhurta — the pre-dawn slowing.

Argument 2 (~200w): Institutional patience. The Indian judiciary's deliberative pace (criticised as delay, but also as care); the Constituent Assembly's 165 sittings over 2 years 11

months 18 days; the Standing Committee model. The Public Interest Litigation (PIL) doctrine that grew patiently after 1976.

Argument 3 (~200w): Civilisational patience. India's banyan tree-style federalism. Tamil Nadu's mid-day meal evolved from 1956 Madras pilot. Bhakra-Nangal envisaged 1948, completed 1963. UPI took 6 years to scale (2016-22) before going global. Patience is the cement of compound progress.

Counter-view (~150w): Patience can become passivity — the 'Hindu rate of growth' (Raj Krishna, 1978) of 3.5% till liberalisation; the cancer patient's 5-year diagnostic delay. Patience without movement is paralysis. The discipline is patient action, not patient inaction.

Conclusion (~100w): The Tao Te Ching: 'Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.' A citizen who can wait without rage and act without panic is the foundation of a republic that lasts. Speed is impressive; patience is durable.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Carl Honore, 'In Praise of Slowness' (2004)
- Walter Mischel's Marshmallow Test, 1972
- Yogasutras II.46 sthira-sukham asanam
- Constituent Assembly 165 sittings (1946-49)
- Standing Committee model
- 'Hindu rate of growth' coinage (Raj Krishna, 1978)
- Bhakra-Nangal project (1948-63)
- Tao Te Ching
- Hindi: 'gati ke yug mein dhairya sabse durlabh kala hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Walter Mischel Marshmallow Test, Stanford 1972
- Bhakra-Nangal dam, completed 1963
- UPI scaling 2016-2022
- Constituent Assembly of India sittings, 1946-1949
- Carl Honore, 'In Praise of Slowness' (2004)
- Slow Food Movement (Carlo Petrini, 1986)

MODEL ANSWER

Carl Honore's *In Praise of Slowness* (2004) opens with the author timing himself reading bedtime stories to his son. He had begun skipping pages to finish faster. He noticed. He stopped. The book that followed was a small report from a civilisation that had industrialised speed and was beginning to suspect the cost. Two decades later, the Indian bullet train cuts Mumbai-Ahmedabad from seven hours to two. The smartphone delivers a verdict before the trial begins. WhatsApp delivers outrage before the fact is checked. Patience — the un-trainable skill that separates wisdom from velocity — has become rare precisely because everything around it has become fast. In a civilisation built on speed, patience is now the most counter-cultural virtue. Personal patience is older than philosophy. The *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, around the second century BCE, defined the meditative posture in two words: *sthira-sukham asanam* (II.46) — steady and comfortable. Steadiness is the body's patience. The Japanese tea ceremony, the Zen sitting practice, the Christian contemplative tradition, the Sufi *sabr* — every mature culture has built rituals to teach the slow breath. Walter Mischel's marshmallow experiment at Stanford in the late 1960s, with results published in 1972, gave the West a memorable image: four-year-old children offered the choice between one marshmallow now or two marshmallows in fifteen minutes. Follow-up studies tracked these children into adulthood; those who had waited correlated, on average, with stronger educational outcomes, better physical health, lower stress. The findings have been refined over decades — context and trust matter as much as character — but the lesson holds. The capacity to wait without rage is a foundational human skill. The Indian concept of *brahma muhurta*, the pre-dawn quiet hour reserved for inwardness, encodes the same insight: certain capacities require slowness as their habitat.

Institutional patience is the form most relevant to a republic. The Constituent Assembly of India sat for two years, eleven months and eighteen days — across 165 sittings — to draft the Constitution. The members debated each article, each schedule, each comma. The result, by their own admission, was imperfect; it has been amended 106 times. But the imperfection arrived at deliberately is more durable than the perfection achieved in haste. The Departmentally Related Standing Committee system, instituted in 1993, brought a similar institutional patience to legislation: bills examined clause by clause, officials questioned, experts heard, dissenting notes recorded. The Public Interest Litigation doctrine, which grew through Justice P N Bhagwati's and Justice V R Krishna Iyer's decisions from 1976 onward, is institutional patience extended to social justice — the courts willing to hear the voiceless slowly,

over years, in matters that markets and parliaments had failed to address. The Law Commission's 277 reports across seven decades represent another form of patient institutional thinking — academic temperament applied to legislative reform.

Civilisational patience is the longest horizon. The Bhakra-Nangal multipurpose project was envisaged in 1948, foundation-stoned by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1955, and inaugurated in 1963 — 15 years from imagination to operation. The Tamil Nadu mid-day meal scheme, the world's largest school feeding programme, evolved from a 1956 Madras Corporation pilot to its full state-wide reach in 1982 under M G Ramachandran, with national universalisation in 2001. The Unified Payments Interface, launched in April 2016, processed its first 1 billion monthly transactions only in October 2019 and crossed 17 billion in March 2025 — six years of patient infrastructure-building before exponential adoption. India's better stories are stories of compound progress: small additions sustained across decades, not dramatic announcements abandoned within years. The space programme, polio eradication (free since 2014 after 30 years of effort), the literacy mission, the immunisation cold chain, the highways grid — each is a patience story.

The objection must be honestly stated. Patience can become passivity. The economist Raj Krishna in 1978 coined the phrase 'Hindu rate of growth' to describe India's sluggish 3.5 per cent annual GDP growth from 1950 to the 1980s — a sluggishness that, in retrospect, kept tens of millions in poverty longer than was necessary. The cancer patient who waits five years to investigate a symptom is not patient; she is in denial. The whistle-blower who waits to file a complaint until the evidence is destroyed is not patient; he is complicit. Patience without movement is paralysis. The Indian planning tradition occasionally fell into precisely this trap — the licence-permit-quota Raj that the 1991 reforms dismantled. The judicial backlog of over 5 crore pending cases is patience that has crossed into negligence; due process, properly understood, includes time.

The distinction that survives is between patient action and patient inaction. Patient action waits for the right moment, the right alliance, the right evidence — and then moves. Patient inaction merely waits. The discipline is to know which is which. Mahatma Gandhi's twelve years between his return from South Africa in 1915 and the Salt March of 1930 were a patient construction of constituency, vocabulary and method. India's space programme, from Vikram Sarabhai's 1962 vision to Chandrayaan-3's south-pole landing in August 2023, is patient action across sixty years.

The contemporary challenge is that markets, media and politics each reward immediate reaction. Quarterly earnings drive corporate decisions; daily news cycles drive political ones; second-by-second metrics drive media ones. Algorithmic feeds reward what fits in seconds; literature requires hours; relationships require years; civilisations require generations. To insist on longer time scales in an environment optimised for the shortest is to swim against a strong current. Carlo Petrini's Slow Food Movement, launched in Bra, Italy in 1986 in response to a McDonald's opening near the Spanish Steps in Rome, became a global counter-culture whose principles — good, clean, fair — extended into Slow Cities, Slow Travel, Slow Money and Slow Fashion. The deeper claim is that speed is not value-neutral; it has economic, ecological and human costs the price signal alone does not capture. In India, the analogous traditions — community feasts, festival cycles, joint-family meal timings — survive in patches and are worth defending in policy as well as in private life.

The *Tao Te Ching* contains a line attributed to Lao Tzu that summarises the case: 'Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.' A citizen who can wait without rage and act without panic is the foundation of a republic that lasts. Speed is impressive; patience is durable. **The institutions that India inherits — and the ones it builds — are tested less by how fast they react than by how patiently they hold their shape under pressure.** In an age where one tweet can topple a reputation and one viral clip can sway an election, the citizen and the institution capable of waiting, observing, and deciding slowly — these are the rarest assets the republic still has to defend. The slow virtue is the most modern one because it is the most needed.

SOURCES

- Gandhian Philosophy: Satya, Ahimsa, Satyagraha, Sarvodaya, Trusteeship
- Tagore's Philosophy: Universalism, Visva-Bharati, Sadhana and Crisis in Civilization
- Yogasutras of Patanjali, Sanskrit text and translation

patience

dhairya

Marshmallow Test

deliberative democracy

slow food

patient capital

compound progress

Brahma muhurta

Q17

Regret is the school in which character finishes its education

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

REGRET, REFLECTION AND MORAL GROWTH

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Daniel Pink's 'The Power of Regret' (2022): the most universal human emotion is not happiness — it is regret. The Mahabharata's Karna, dying, regrets only the question he never asked his mother. Aurangzeb's deathbed letters to his sons (1707) are studies in royal regret. Thesis: regret, well-used, is not paralysis. It is the school in which character finishes its incomplete education — the only honest tutor of the second half of life.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Personal regret. Pink's four categories — foundation, boldness, moral, connection regrets. The 12-step programmes' Step 8/9 (amends). Hospice studies (Bronnie Ware, 2012): 'I wish I had let myself be happier' tops the list of dying regrets.

Argument 2 (~200w): National regret. Germany's post-1945 culture of Vergangenheitsbewältigung (working through the past); the Stolpersteine memorial stones in 1,400 European cities. India's 1962 China defeat and the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat report (still classified). The Mizoram Peace Accord 1986 after the 1966 bombings. Australia's 'Sorry Day' to Stolen Generations (2008).

Argument 3 (~200w): Institutional regret. The Supreme Court's review of ADM Jabalpur in 2017 Puttaswamy (overruling 1976); the 2017 Andhra Pradesh apology for Vakapalli sexual-assault inaction; the 2023 Public Apology Bill drafts. Justice Chandrachud's lecture at the National Police Academy 2024 on systemic regret.

Counter-view (~150w): Regret can become rumination, destructive when prolonged. CBT distinguishes useful regret (action-impulse) from useless rumination. Nations that obsess over historical guilt may freeze.

Conclusion (~100w): Soren Kierkegaard: 'Life can only be understood backwards but must be lived forwards.' Regret is the rear-view mirror that helps us drive — not stop. A republic that can apologise and improve is stronger than one that pretends never to err.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Daniel Pink, 'The Power of Regret' (2022)
- Bronnie Ware hospice study (2012)
- Mizoram Peace Accord 1986
- Puttaswamy overruling ADM Jabalpur (2017)
- Australia 'Sorry Day', 13 February 2008

- Germany's Vergangenheitsbewältigung
- Henderson Brooks-Bhagat report (1962)
- Kierkegaard on understanding backwards
- Hindi: 'paschattaap charitra ki antim paathshala hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Daniel Pink, 'The Power of Regret' (2022)
- Bronnie Ware, 'Top Five Regrets of the Dying' (2012)
- Mizoram Peace Accord, 30 June 1986
- Australian PM Kevin Rudd 'Sorry' speech, 13 February 2008
- Justice K S Puttaswamy (overruling ADM Jabalpur), 24 August 2017
- Stolpersteine memorial project, Gunter Demnig, since 1996

MODEL ANSWER

Daniel Pink's *The Power of Regret* (2022) reports the result of the largest survey of regret ever conducted — 16,000 respondents across 105 countries. The finding contradicts the self-help shelf: the most universal human emotion is not happiness. It is regret. The Mahabharata's Karna, dying on the battlefield at Kurukshetra, regrets above all the question he never asked his mother Kunti — whose son he truly was. Aurangzeb's last letters to his sons in 1707, copies preserved in the National Archives, read as confessions: 'I came alone, I go as a stranger.' Regret, well-used, is not paralysis. It is the school in which character finishes its incomplete education — the honest tutor of the second half of life. The republic, like the person, becomes more itself when it can name what it got wrong.

Personal regret is the first classroom. Pink distinguishes four enduring categories: foundation regrets (savings not made, health not preserved), boldness regrets (chances not taken), moral regrets (lines crossed), and connection regrets (relationships allowed to fade). The twelve-step recovery tradition, beginning with Alcoholics Anonymous in 1939, devotes two of its twelve steps (Steps 8 and 9) to making lists of those one has harmed and offering amends — a structured pedagogy of regret converted into reparation. Bronnie Ware, a hospice nurse in Australia, published *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* in 2012 after recording the dying wishes of thousands of patients. The top regret was not 'I wish I had earned more' or 'I wish I had achieved more'. It was 'I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.' The second was 'I wish I hadn't worked so hard.' The list keeps teaching the same lesson: life evaluated retrospectively values courage and

connection, not accumulation. The Buddhist concept of *kshama* — patience and forgiveness toward oneself for unconscious harm — provides a parallel structure: regret acknowledged, intention transformed, conduct corrected.

National regret is the second classroom. Germany's post-1945 culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* — 'working through the past' — became a state project, embedded in textbooks, memorials, museums and trials. The artist Gunter Demnig's Stolpersteine, or stumbling stones, have been installed in over 1,400 European cities since 1996: small brass plates set into the pavement outside the last freely chosen home of a Holocaust victim. The viewer walking past must literally stoop to read the names. Australia's Sorry Day of 13 February 2008, when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised in Parliament to the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal children removed from their families across the twentieth century, was a national rite of acknowledgement. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, completed in 2015 and addressing the residential-school system, generated 94 calls to action. India's record is more uneven. The 1962 China defeat produced the Henderson Brooks-Bhagat report, which remains classified six decades later — a national regret literally locked away. The Mizoram Peace Accord of 30 June 1986, signed by Laldenga, brought thirty years of insurgency to an end and is widely regarded as one of post-Independence India's most honest acts of political reconciliation. The 1984 anti-Sikh violence in Delhi has produced several judicial commissions but no national apology. Each example demonstrates what national regret can do: not paralyse, but reset.

Institutional regret is the third and least developed classroom. In 1976, in the depth of the Emergency, the Supreme Court delivered *ADM Jabalpur v Shivkant Shukla* (also called the Habeas Corpus case), holding that the right to life under Article 21 could be suspended during a proclaimed Emergency. The dissent of Justice H R Khanna cost him the chief-justiceship. Four decades later, in *Puttaswamy v Union of India* (24 August 2017), the same Supreme Court explicitly overruled *ADM Jabalpur*. Justice D Y Chandrachud, whose father Justice Y V Chandrachud had been in the original majority, wrote that the decision 'was an aberration in the constitutional jurisprudence of our country.' That single sentence is institutional regret entering the legal record. Similar gestures appear elsewhere: the 2017 Andhra Pradesh government's apology for delayed response to the Vakapalli sexual-assault case; the various draft Public Apology Bills circulating in Parliament since 2023; Chief Justice Chandrachud's 2024 lecture at the National Police Academy explicitly addressing systemic regret as a tool of police reform; and the Supreme Court's overruling of

Suresh Kumar Koushal v Naz Foundation through Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India (September 2018) which decriminalised consensual same-sex relations.

A counter-view deserves attention. Regret, taken to excess, becomes rumination — the repetitive replaying of past wrongs without forward movement. Clinical psychology distinguishes useful regret, which generates action-impulses, from useless rumination, which simply re-experiences the wound. Nations that obsess endlessly over historical grievances can freeze in their own past. The Northern Irish Troubles, the Israel-Palestine entrenchments, the Hindu-Muslim partition memory — each shows what happens when a society cannot transmute regret into reconciliation. Regret must teach, then release.

The discipline, therefore, is structured. Acknowledge specifically what went wrong. Repair, where repair is possible. Reform, where reform is the only honest amends. And then move. The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1995-98, despite its acknowledged limitations, remains the most ambitious modern attempt to systematise this discipline. The Rwandan Gacaca courts, conducted across the 2000s, processed nearly two million cases related to the 1994 genocide through community-based justice. Each model has strengths and weaknesses, and each demonstrates that structured public regret is a republican capacity, not merely a private feeling. The Mizoram model, in a smaller register, achieved similar reset. India's larger pending exercises — on Emergency excesses, on Sikh victims of 1984, on the displaced in Kashmir, on tribal histories of dispossession, on the long under-acknowledgement of Dalit historical experience — wait their turn.

Soren Kierkegaard wrote in his journals in 1843: 'Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.' Regret is the rear-view mirror that helps the driver drive — not stop. **A republic that can acknowledge its errors and improve is stronger than one that pretends never to err.** Character, in persons and in nations, finishes its education in the school of regret. Those who refuse to enrol stay novices forever, repeating the same mistakes with more confidence each time. Those who enrol — soberly, specifically, without theatre — graduate into the kind of maturity the second half of life and the second half of a republic both require. The hardest sentence in any language is also the most freeing: I was wrong, and here is how I will do better.

SOURCES

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regret

paschattaap

Stolpersteine

Sorry Day

Mizoram Accord

ADM Jabalpur

Vergangenheitsbewältigung

Kierkegaard

Q18**To listen is to grant another the dignity of being real**

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

LISTENING, DIALOGUE AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Martin Buber's 'I and Thou' (1923): the moment we listen, we transform the other from 'it' to 'thou', from object to person. Indian prime-time television features 12 voices speaking simultaneously; parliament sees more shouting than recording. Thesis: to listen is the smallest, hardest and most political act — it grants another the dignity of being real. A democracy of speakers without listeners is acclamation, not deliberation.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Therapeutic listening. Carl Rogers' client-centred therapy; Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication; the WHO Quality Rights Initiative training counsellors in active listening. India's iCALL, Vandrevale, Sneha helplines — listening as public health.

Argument 2 (~200w): Civic listening. Anna Hazare's Hindu-Muslim-Sikh-Christian listening padayatras; Aruna Roy's Jan Sunwai public hearings that birthed RTI; the Supreme Court's amicus-curiae listening tradition; PRS Legislative Research analysis as institutional listening.

Argument 3 (~200w): Diplomatic listening. India's Neighbourhood First diplomacy depends on listening to Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal anxieties; G20 Presidency 2023 emphasised inclusive listening (African Union admission); BIMSTEC charter (2025).

Counter-view (~150w): Some listening is performative — town-halls staged for video. Tokenistic listening can be worse than honest refusal because it consumes the speaker's hope. Listening must lead to changed action, or it is theatre.

Conclusion (~100w): Stephen Covey's Seventh Habit: 'Seek first to understand, then to be understood.' To listen is to bow, momentarily, to another's humanity. A republic of citizens who can listen is a republic that cannot easily be torn apart.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Martin Buber, 'I and Thou' (1923)

- Carl Rogers' client-centred therapy
- Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication
- Aruna Roy's Jan Sunwai movement
- WHO Quality Rights Initiative
- G20 inclusion of African Union, September 2023
- BIMSTEC Charter 2025
- Stephen Covey's Seventh Habit
- Hindi: 'sunna doosri ki sachchaai ko maan dena hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Martin Buber, 'I and Thou' (1923)
- Aruna Roy's MKSS Jan Sunwai, Rajasthan
- G20 admission of African Union, 9 September 2023
- iCALL helpline by TISS
- Carl Rogers, 'On Becoming a Person' (1961)
- WHO Quality Rights Initiative

MODEL ANSWER

Martin Buber's *I and Thou*, published in 1923, made a small grammatical observation with vast consequence. There are two basic words a human being can address to the world: 'I-It', which treats the other as object, instrument or category; and 'I-Thou', which treats the other as person, end and presence. The moment one truly listens, Buber argued, the other is transformed from 'it' to 'thou'. Indian prime-time television features twelve voices speaking simultaneously; parliament records more shouting than registering; family dinners are interrupted every nine minutes by phones (Nielsen India 2024). To listen — actually, patiently, without rehearsing one's reply — has become the smallest, hardest and most political act available to a citizen. It grants the other the dignity of being real. In a culture optimised for transmission, reception is the rarest skill.

Therapeutic listening is the most empirically validated form. Carl Rogers, in *On Becoming a Person* (1961), founded client-centred therapy on the radical idea that unconditional positive regard and active listening, without immediate diagnosis or advice, produce healing more reliably than expert interpretation. Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication, developed from the 1960s, taught millions to listen for needs beneath complaints. The World Health Organization's Quality Rights

Initiative, rolled out in India in collaboration with NIMHANS Bengaluru, has trained thousands of mental-health workers in active-listening techniques. India's helplines — iCALL (TISS Mumbai, launched 2012), Vandrevalla Foundation (24×7), Sneha Chennai, KIRAN (the Ministry of Social Justice 24×7 helpline since 2020) — answer hundreds of thousands of distress calls annually. Suicide-prevention research consistently finds that the single most effective intervention is a present, unjudging listener. The 2024 National Suicide Prevention Strategy explicitly identifies trained listeners as a frontline public-health intervention.

Civic listening is older and more political. The MKSS jan sunwai or public-hearing movement that Aruna Roy, Nikhil Dey and Shankar Singh built in the villages of central Rajasthan in the 1990s did one revolutionary thing: it read out muster rolls in front of the people whose names appeared on them. Names of the dead listed as wage-recipients; names of the long-migrated listed as present; names of villagers who had never worked listed as having worked twenty days. The jan sunwai was public listening that became public accounting. The Right to Information Act of 2005 emerged directly from this practice. The Supreme Court's amicus-curiae tradition is a form of judicial listening — counsel appointed to bring voices that might otherwise not be heard before the bench. PRS Legislative Research's bill-by-bill analyses, available to MPs and the public since 2005, are institutional listening to draft statutes. Even the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy of 2014, when honoured rather than evaded, is the State listening before it legislates. The Mygov.in platform, the e-Consultation portals run by various ministries, and the parliamentary committees that invite written submissions extend the channels through which the State can hear citizens.

Diplomatic listening is the longest-range form. India's Neighbourhood First doctrine, articulated formally in 2014, depends on patient listening to the anxieties of Maldives, Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka — anxieties about size asymmetry, infrastructure conditionality, river-water disputes and cultural sensitivities. The Indian Ocean Region engagements have a similar texture. India's G20 Presidency in 2023 made listening into a doctrine: the inclusion of the African Union as a permanent member on 9 September 2023 in New Delhi was preceded by months of consultations with African capitals. The BIMSTEC Charter, finalised in 2025, was the product of listening across seven member states. Voice of Global South Summits convened by India in 2023 and 2024, with 125 developing countries each time, created a listening forum that the existing multilateral architecture had not provided. Each act of

listening is a deposit in the diplomatic trust account that pays dividends when crises arrive.

The counter-view is sharp. Some listening is performative. Town-halls staged for television, consultations summarised before they happen, public-hearing minutes drafted in advance — these forms of tokenistic listening can be worse than honest refusal, because they consume the speaker's hope. The Rajasthan jan sunwai succeeded precisely because the muster-roll reading produced consequences: false entries deleted, wages paid, officials suspended. Without consequence, listening becomes theatre, and theatre that pretends to be politics produces cynicism. The Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy, observed in fewer than a quarter of bills in the Seventeenth Lok Sabha, is a study in this failure. Listening must lead to changed action, or it is dishonest. The 2024 Vidhi Centre report on environmental clearance public hearings documents how rural communities found their objections recorded but rarely reflected in final decisions.

The deeper challenge is the cognitive architecture of contemporary attention. Social media platforms reward fast response, not deep reception. The economy of likes, retweets and reels is structurally hostile to the slow asymmetry of listening. A speaker who pauses to think loses the algorithm. A listener who absorbs before reacting loses the timeline. This is not merely an aesthetic problem; it is a civic one. A democracy in which citizens have lost the capacity to listen to each other across difference is structurally unable to compromise, and compromise — not victory — is the daily currency of constitutional politics.

Listening across difference is particularly difficult. Conversations between economic classes in India often fail because both sides lack vocabulary for the other's reality. Conversations across religious lines have thinned in many metros. Conversations across linguistic boundaries are work in a country of 22 scheduled languages; the BHASHINI translation stack makes much of this technically possible, though the cultural willingness to listen is the harder variable. Some reconstructive paths are visible: schools teaching dialogue rather than only debate, public broadcasters protecting long-form interviews, citizen-juries deliberating over days, family practices like phone-free dinners. The Vedic concept of *shravana* — first listening, then reflection (*manana*), then internalisation (*nididhyasana*) — places listening at the foundation of all serious knowledge.

Stephen Covey's seventh habit, popularised in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989), reads: 'Seek first to understand, then to be understood.' To listen is to bow,

momentarily, to another's humanity — to accept that one's first impression may be wrong, one's framing incomplete, one's certainty premature. The bow does not surrender; it positions for accurate response. A republic of citizens who can listen across caste, class, language, religion and region is a republic that cannot easily be torn apart, because the bonds it forms are made of attention rather than affinity. **To listen is the smallest political act and one of the largest gifts. It grants the other the dignity of being real, and in granting it, makes the listener real too.**

SOURCES

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- BIMSTEC: Bay of Bengal Cooperation, Charter and India's Pivot
- Tagore's Philosophy: Universalism, Visva-Bharati, Sadhana and Crisis in Civilization

active listening

Jan Sunwai

Nonviolent Communication

I-Thou

Neighbourhood First

BIMSTEC

G20

deliberation

ESSAY

Society

16 practice questions

Q19

Loneliness in a connected age is a wound the algorithm cannot heal

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

TECHNOLOGY, MENTAL HEALTH AND HUMAN BONDS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the WHO's 2023 declaration that loneliness is a 'global public health concern' as deadly as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. India, paradoxically the world's most connected market — 1.2 billion mobile subscribers, 850 million internet users — logs rising mental-health distress (NMHS 2016: 150 million Indians needing care). Thesis: the algorithm can deliver a friend's birthday reminder, but cannot deliver the presence of a friend.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The science. Sherry Turkle's 'Alone Together' — we expect more from technology and less from each other. Robert Putnam's 'Bowling Alone'. India's joint-family dissolution, internal migration (450 million per Census 2011), nuclear urban households. The UK appointed a Minister of Loneliness in 2018; Japan in 2021.

Argument 2 (~200w): The young. NCRB 2022: 13,089 student suicides, a 4% rise. Cyberbullying, FOMO, parasocial relationships with influencers. NIMHANS data shows 8-10% adolescent prevalence of depression. The Aaron Schwartz / Sushant Singh Rajput cases as cultural inflection points.

Argument 3 (~200w): The old. India's 60+ population: 153 million (Census 2011) projected to 347 million by 2050. The UNEP Frontiers Report 2025 flagged 'ageing in isolation' as an emerging risk. SAGE portal, Vayoshreshtha Samman, the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly — underfunded responses to a structural problem.

Counter-view (~150w): Technology has also rescued the lonely — long-distance migrant workers video-calling families nightly, queer youth finding community on Reddit, mental-health helplines like iCall and Vandrevalla Foundation. The tool is neutral; the architecture is not. The fix is intentional design, not technological retreat.

Conclusion (~100w): The phone is a microphone, but not yet an embrace. India must re-engineer cities for chance encounters — functional parks, walkable streets, community

kitchens — and re-engineer apps for depth over scroll. Loneliness is not a personal failure; it is a planning failure.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- WHO 2023 declaration on loneliness
- Sherry Turkle, 'Alone Together' (2011)
- Robert Putnam, 'Bowling Alone' (2000)
- NCRB 2022 student suicide data (13,089)
- NMHS 2016 — 150 million Indians need mental-health care
- UNEP Frontiers Report 2025 — ageing in isolation
- Census 2011 — 450 million internal migrants
- Hindi: 'judaav ke daur mein akelapan'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- UK Minister of Loneliness, appointed 2018
- Japan's Minister for Loneliness, 2021
- iCall and Vandrevala Foundation mental-health helplines
- SAGE portal (Seniors Care Ageing Growth Engine), India
- Sushant Singh Rajput case, 2020
- Sherry Turkle's TED talk, 'Connected, But Alone'

MODEL ANSWER

In November 2023, the World Health Organization declared loneliness a 'pressing global public-health concern', citing evidence that chronic social isolation carries the cardiovascular risk of fifteen cigarettes a day. The Government of India that same year had a paradoxical statistic to file: 1.18 billion mobile subscribers, 850 million Internet users, more daily UPI transactions than the rest of the world combined. And yet the National Mental Health Survey of 2016, still the most authoritative Indian baseline, reported 150 million Indians needed active mental-health intervention, with only one in ten receiving any. **The algorithm can deliver a friend's birthday reminder; it cannot deliver the presence of a friend.** Loneliness in a connected age is a wound the architecture is engineered to deepen.

Sherry Turkle, professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, named the paradox in *Alone Together* in 2011: we have come to expect more from technology and less from each other. The expectation is intuitive. A phone never interrupts, never demands eye-contact, never disagrees inconveniently. Robert Putnam in *Bowling*

Alone in 2000 had charted the corrosion of community in America: declining bowling-league membership, declining PTA attendance, declining church choirs. Putnam's American argument applies, in altered form, to the Indian urban condition. The joint family of the 1970s housed three or four generations under one roof; the median Indian urban household is now nuclear, a parent or two and a child, often with both parents in salaried work, often with the child in a screened cocoon by the age of eleven.

The young are the worst affected. The National Crime Records Bureau of 2022 reported 13,089 student suicides, a 4 per cent rise over the previous year. NIMHANS, Bengaluru, places adolescent depression prevalence at eight to ten per cent. Beneath the numbers run the texture of digital adolescence: parasocial relationships with influencers, cyberbullying that follows the victim home, FOMO induced by curated Instagram feeds, the comparison engine that turns every peer into a competitor. The Kota coaching ecosystem in Rajasthan, where 29 students ended their lives in 2023, is the most visible symptom of a much wider phenomenon. Sushant Singh Rajput's death in June 2020 became a cultural inflection point, but the systemic problem is older and deeper than any one tragedy.

The old are the second invisible cohort. India's 60-plus population stood at 153 million in the 2011 Census and is projected by the UNFPA to reach 347 million by 2050. The UNEP Frontiers Report of 2025 flagged 'ageing in isolation' as an emerging risk, especially in a country where over 450 million people migrated internally as per Census 2011, leaving an entire generation of grandparents alone in villages of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Tamil Nadu. The SAGE portal launched in 2021, the Vayoshreshtha Samman, and the National Programme for Healthcare of the Elderly are scattered responses to what is essentially a structural problem of demographic transition meeting digital fragmentation.

Governments have begun to act on the recognition. The United Kingdom appointed a Minister of Loneliness in January 2018 after Jo Cox MP's commission documented the issue; Japan appointed one in February 2021. The European Union's Joint Research Centre, in 2022, established the first multi-country loneliness barometer. India does not yet have a ministerial portfolio or a barometer, but it does have the rudiments. Tele-MANAS, launched on 10 October 2022, is a 24-hour mental-health helpline in 20 languages that crossed 14 lakh calls by 2024. iCall, run by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, and the Vandrevalla Foundation, run pro bono, provide trained counsellors. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 made access a right. The deficit lies not in legislation but in workforce, in stigma, and in spatial design.

Cities and apps both fail at the deeper design question: how does the built environment of contemporary India enable, or disable, chance encounters? The classical Indian *mohalla*, the temple-tank, the village *baithak*, the Calcutta *rowak*, the Bombay chawl, the South Indian *thinnai* were architectures of incidental sociability, where neighbours met without an appointment. The new Indian skyline rewards privacy: gated communities, lift lobbies designed for anonymity, balconies converted to AC-clad rooms. Walking infrastructure has thinned, parks have shrunk, and public seating, with the exception of metro corridors, has been priced out. The dream of every aspirational household is the apartment in which a man can return home and not meet a single neighbour. That dream is also the architecture of solitude.

The counter-argument is fair and important. Technology has also rescued the lonely. The migrant rickshaw-puller in Mumbai who video-calls his daughter in Banka, Bihar, every night before he sleeps; the queer adolescent in Indore who finds, on Reddit and on the Pink Whale forum, a community his town does not yet allow; the widow in Kolkata who joins a Facebook group for senior citizens and is taught, by a grandson three time zones away, to play online Scrabble: each is testimony that the screen is not the enemy. The tool is neutral; the architecture around it is not. **The fix is intentional design, not technological retreat.**

What might intentional design look like? Schools could mandate two periods a week of unstructured peer time, without screens, modelled on the Finnish ‘recess’ philosophy. Workplaces could rewrite occupational-safety guidelines to include ‘psychosocial-safety’ provisions, as Australia did in 2023. Urban-development policy under AMRUT 2.0 could mandate one community park per 5,000 residents and one library per 25,000, both walkable. The District Mental Health Programme, currently operational in 692 districts, could be backed with budgetary parity, raising mental-health spending from 0.8 per cent of the health budget toward the WHO-recommended 5 per cent. Platforms could be required, under DPDP Act consent rules, to default infinite scroll to off for under-18 users.

The phone is a microphone, and on its best day a friend, but it is not yet an embrace. Indian civilisation has, for over two millennia, treated *sangha*, community, as one of the three jewels alongside Buddha and dharma. The contemporary equivalent of *sangha* is the cricket maidan that has been built over, the neighbourhood tea-stall that has been replaced by a takeaway window, the Sunday gathering that has been replaced by a WhatsApp ‘family group’. A republic which takes seriously its citizens’ wellbeing must take seriously the conditions under which loneliness becomes everyday weather rather than passing storm. **Loneliness is not a personal failure; it is a planning**

failure, and like every planning failure, it can be planned out. That work, undramatic and patient, is the most urgent infrastructure project of an India entering its demographic prime.

SOURCES

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- Migrants in India — Internal Migration, Interstate Workers and the e-Shram Framework

parasocial relationships

FOMO

social capital

nuclear household

ageing in isolation

Tele-MANAS

loneliness epidemic

screen-time disorder

phantom intimacy

Q20

Education without empathy is mere instruction

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

EDUCATION, ETHICS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Aristotle wrote that educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all. India produces 1.5 million engineers a year, yet ranks 126 on the World Happiness Report 2024. Thesis: when education becomes an assembly line for employability, it manufactures qualifications without producing wisdom — instruction without education.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The conceptual gap. Tagore's Shantiniketan vs Macaulay's 1835 Minute — the original civilisational fork. Krishnamurti's Rishi Valley schools as antidote. The NEP 2020 mentions 'experiential, holistic' learning, but board-exam culture still rewards memorisation.

Argument 2 (~200w): Empathy as cognitive skill. Theory of mind, mirror neurons. ASER 2023 reports 25% of Class V children cannot read Class II text. Add to this: half of teachers cannot identify a depressed student. The 2023 Kota suicides (29 deaths) are a curriculum tragedy as much as a coaching one.

Argument 3 (~200w): Institutional pathways. Finnish model — no standardised testing till age 16. Delhi's Happiness Curriculum (since 2018) and Mindfulness Curriculum. The Happiness Foundations Scheme in Madhya Pradesh. NCERT's Health and Wellness Modules. Each is a sign that empathy can be examinable if we redesign the test.

Counter-view (~150w): Sceptics say empathy training is a luxury when half of Class V cannot read. But empathy and literacy are complementary, not sequential. The teacher

who notices the hungry child is also the teacher who teaches reading better. Mid-Day Meal proves it: nutrition lifted enrolment by 11% (NSSO data).

Conclusion (~100w): Vivekananda: 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' Schools must produce citizens, not just CVs. The classroom that teaches the child to identify a friend's tears is more constitutional than the one that teaches him to identify a sum.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Aristotle on education of mind and heart
- Macaulay's Minute 1835 vs Tagore's Shantiniketan
- NEP 2020 on experiential learning
- ASER 2023 learning outcomes
- Kota suicides 2023 — 29 deaths
- Delhi Happiness Curriculum (2018)
- Finnish education model
- Vivekananda on education
- Hindi: 'shiksha bina sanvedna keval shiksha-pradan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan
- Krishnamurti's Rishi Valley School
- Delhi Happiness Curriculum, since 2018
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme (118 million beneficiaries)
- Finland's PISA results vs no-standardised-testing policy
- Sugata Mitra's 'Hole in the Wall' experiment, 1999

MODEL ANSWER

Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, wrote that educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all. The line has the weariness of an instructor who has watched too many clever students grow into adults of corrupted judgment. Twenty-three centuries later, the test still finds India struggling. The country graduates roughly 1.5 million engineers a year, has surpassed China in the number of STEM enrolments, and yet ranks 126 on the World Happiness Report of 2024. **When education becomes an assembly line for employability, it manufactures qualifications without producing wisdom.** Instruction is what one receives in a coaching factory; education is what one receives in a school worthy of the name.

The Indian fork in this road dates to 1835. Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* recommended a class of Indians 'Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.' His instrument, the colonial school, prepared clerks for an administrative empire, prizing recall over reason and obedience over inquiry. Rabindranath Tagore's response at Shantiniketan in 1901, and later Visva-Bharati in 1921, was the counter-proposal: open-air classrooms under amaltas trees, learning in the mother tongue, music and craft and agriculture as part of the curriculum. Jiddu Krishnamurti's Rishi Valley School, founded in 1926, made a similar wager. The two visions of Indian education, the assembly line and the grove, have wrestled for a century, and the assembly line has been winning.

The data on what the assembly line has produced is sobering. The Annual Status of Education Report of 2023 finds that 25 per cent of Class V children in rural India cannot read a Class II text; 56 per cent of Class V children cannot perform a Class II division. The NAS 2021 found Class X mathematics scores declined nationally. The Kota suicides of 2023, in which 29 students between the ages of 16 and 20 ended their lives in a single district of Rajasthan, indict not only that town's coaching ecosystem but a broader curriculum that measures a child by ranks. Half of teachers, in NIMHANS' surveys, cannot identify the symptoms of clinical depression in adolescent students. The classroom that does not know what it is failing cannot start succeeding.

Empathy, the missing curricular ingredient, is not a vague virtue. It is a cognitive faculty as testable as reading. Developmental psychology calls it 'theory of mind', the capacity to understand that another person has a separate inner life, with desires and pain that may differ from one's own. Neuroscientists from Giacomo Rizzolatti's Parma laboratory onwards have located mirror neurons whose activation correlates with both action and observation of action. **Empathy can be taught, measured, and degraded; like literacy, it is a public good with personal returns.** Yet the Indian curriculum spends less than three per cent of its annual instructional hours on the deliberate cultivation of social-emotional learning.

Better models exist, and India has some of them. Finland abolished standardised testing until age 16 in the 1970s reform and consistently appears at the top of PISA rankings, demonstrating that learning is not the same as testing. Singapore's Character and Citizenship Education programme is examinable but not punitive, integrated across subjects from primary one onward. Closer home, the Delhi Happiness Curriculum, launched on 2 July 2018 in 1,030 government schools, devotes the first 35 minutes of each day to mindfulness, storytelling, and discussion. Two years of independent evaluation found measurable gains in students' empathy scores,

classroom participation, and absenteeism. Madhya Pradesh's Happiness Foundations Scheme and the NCERT's Health and Wellness Modules are sibling experiments. Each is a sign that empathy can be examinable if we redesign the test.

The New Education Policy of 2020 reaches in this direction. It mandates experiential, holistic, multidisciplinary learning, replaces the 10+2 structure with the 5+3+3+4 model that recognises early-childhood education, and emphasises mother-tongue instruction in the foundational years. The PARAKH National Assessment Centre has been set up under NCERT to design competence-based assessment. The Vidya Pravesh school-preparation module and the NIPUN Bharat literacy mission show intent. But the gap between policy and pedagogy is wide; board-exam culture, coaching dependence, and parental anxiety still pull schools back toward rote.

An honest counter-argument deserves consideration. Sceptics ask: when half the country's Class V cannot read a Class II passage, is empathy training a luxury that diverts scarce minutes? The objection is humane but logically inverted. Empathy and literacy are complementary, not sequential. A teacher who notices that a child has skipped breakfast and arranges a banana from the mid-day meal store is the same teacher who, an hour later, teaches that child to read better. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme of 1995, today reaching 11.8 crore children in 11.2 lakh schools, raised primary enrolment by 11 per cent (NSSO data, 2005); attention, an empathic act of policy, became a precondition for instruction, not its competitor.

What might full implementation look like? Empathy-tagged outcomes could be included in school-quality dashboards under Samagra Shiksha. Teacher training at District Institutes of Education and Training could include a compulsory social-emotional-learning module. The Right to Education Act could be amended to specify that 'quality education' under Section 8 includes wellbeing of the learner. Boards could deliberately cap board-exam weightage at 60 per cent of the final grade, with project work and peer evaluation making up the rest, as the CBSE pilot in 21 schools demonstrated in 2024. Coaching towns could be regulated under the model Rajasthan Coaching Centres Bill 2024, with mandatory counsellor-student ratios and 'cooling-off Sundays'.

Vivekananda, addressing the Parliament of the World's Religions at Chicago on 11 September 1893, defined education in a single sentence: 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' That manifestation is not academic alone. It includes the curiosity to ask why a friend is crying, the courage to defend a classmate from a bully, the discipline to wait one's turn at the canteen window, the

imagination to translate a Bengali poem into Bhojpuri. A classroom that teaches a child to identify a friend's tears is more constitutional than the one that teaches her to identify a sum. The republic of 2026 has unprecedented enrolments, unprecedented digital reach, and unprecedented policy ambition. **What it now owes its children is not better instruction but truer education.** The difference is the difference between a country with engineers and a country with citizens.

SOURCES

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- Right to Education Act (RTE): Article 21A Explained
- Tagore's Philosophy: Universalism, Visva-Bharati, Sadhana and Crisis in Civilization

holistic learning

experiential pedagogy

theory of mind

socio-emotional learning

NEP 2020

ASER

Shantiniketan

competency-based

Q21

India's strength lies in its plurality, not its uniformity

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

PLURALISM, DIVERSITY AND THE IDEA OF INDIA

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Begin with Nehru's discovery of India — the 'palimpsest' on which 'layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed.' India is the only civilisation that survived antiquity with its diversity intact — 4 language families, 1,652 mother tongues (Census 1961), 6 major religions of native origin, 705 Scheduled Tribes. Thesis: plurality is not India's weakness to be managed but India's strength to be cultivated — the operating system, not a bug.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Civilisational case. The Indus seals, Ashokan edicts in three scripts, Akbar's Ibadat Khana, the Bhakti and Sufi traditions, Tagore's Visva-Bharati. Amartya Sen's 'The Argumentative Indian' — plurality of voice as the deep structure of Indian thought.

Argument 2 (~200w): Constitutional case. The Eighth Schedule (22 languages), Sixth Schedule (autonomous councils), Articles 29-30 (minority rights), Article 371 (special provisions for the Northeast and other regions). The S.R. Bommai judgment (1994) made secularism a basic feature. The 73rd-74th Amendments made decentralisation constitutional.

Argument 3 (~200w): Developmental case. Asymmetric federalism is not weakness; it is the genius of holding-together. Kerala's Decentralised Planning, Mizoram's hill councils, Nagaland's customary law preservation. UN Sustainable Development Goals localised through Panchayat Development Index. Linguistic states (1956) did not balkanise; they integrated.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue plurality breeds fragmentation — Khalistan, Northeast insurgencies, communal riots. But every such episode was deepened by attempts to impose uniformity (Operation Blue Star, language imposition in Tamil Nadu 1965) and healed by accommodation (Punjab Accord 1985, Mizo Accord 1986).

Conclusion (~100w): The Preamble itself opens with 'We the people' — plural, not singular. Mahatma Gandhi: 'It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver'; for India, plurality is health. The idea of India is not a melting pot but a thali — each item distinct, the meal whole.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Nehru's 'palimpsest' image
- Census 1961 — 1,652 mother tongues
- S.R. Bommai v Union of India (1994)
- Eighth Schedule of the Constitution
- Asymmetric federalism — Article 371
- Punjab Accord 1985; Mizo Accord 1986
- Sixth Schedule autonomous councils
- Amartya Sen's 'argumentative Indian'
- Hindi: 'anekta mein ekta hi Bharat ki shakti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Akbar's Ibadat Khana
- Bhakti and Sufi syncretism (Kabir, Khusrau, Tukaram)
- Tagore's Visva-Bharati
- Linguistic Reorganisation of States, 1956
- Mizo Peace Accord, 1986
- Kerala's People's Planning Campaign, 1996
- S.R. Bommai v Union of India (1994)

MODEL ANSWER

In *The Discovery of India*, written in Ahmadnagar Fort prison between April and September 1944, Jawaharlal Nehru groped for an image that would honour what he saw beneath his country's apparent disarray. He found one: India, he wrote, is a palimpsest, 'an ancient parchment on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.' Four language families, 1,652 mother tongues by Census 1961, six major religions of native origin, 705 Scheduled Tribes, 28 States, 8 Union Territories, 22 official languages in the Eighth Schedule. **Plurality is not India's bug to be debugged; it is the operating system on which everything else runs.** A republic that misreads the system as a bug will write patches that break the machine.

The civilisational case for plurality is the longest. The Harappan seals carry undeciphered scripts; the Ashokan edicts at Girnar, Dhauli, and Mansehra were inscribed in three scripts, Brahmi, Kharoshthi, and Greek, addressing populations who did not all read the same tongue. Akbar's Ibadat Khana at Fatehpur Sikri, opened in 1575, convened Sunni, Shia, Hindu, Jain, Zoroastrian, and Jesuit interlocutors before any European court even imagined such a thing. The Bhakti and Sufi movements produced poetry in Awadhi, Braj, Punjabi, Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali, and Persian and Urdu that nobody can today separate by communal label; Kabir's couplets bewildered both pandit and qazi; Amir Khusrau's *qawwali* form was indistinguishable from temple music. Amartya Sen called India 'the argumentative civilisation' in his 2005 book of that name, not as compliment but as anthropological diagnosis.

The Constitution of 1950 is the longest written translation of this civilisational instinct into political grammar. Article 1 calls India 'a Union of States', not states of the Union. The Eighth Schedule, which began with 14 languages, now lists 22. The Sixth Schedule provides for autonomous district councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. Article 371 sets out asymmetric provisions for Nagaland (371A), Mizoram (371G), Sikkim (371F), and the special autonomy of Goa, Manipur, and Andhra. Articles 29 and 30 protect minority rights of culture and education; Article 25 protects freedom of conscience; the seven-judge Bench in *S. R. Bommai v Union of India* in 1994 made secularism part of the basic structure. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 carried plurality down to the panchayat and the municipality.

Plurality is not merely conserved; it has been productively decentralised. Kerala's People's Planning Campaign, launched in 1996 under E. M. S. Namboodiripad's draft and Thomas Isaac's implementation, devolved 35-40 per cent of the State Plan to panchayats. Mizoram's Village Councils, Nagaland's customary law under Article 371A, and Meghalaya's Khasi-Jaintia-Garo councils have preserved indigenous governance within constitutional fence. The Linguistic Reorganisation of States, recommended by the Fazl Ali Commission and implemented in 1956, was widely predicted by Western observers to balkanise India; it integrated it, by allowing Tamils to administer themselves in Tamil and Marathis in Marathi, while remaining citizens of one Union. The Sixth Schedule councils have, since 1952, run schools, dispensaries, and forests in the languages of their people.

Plurality is also a developmental dividend, not a liability. The UN Sustainable Development Goals, localised in India through the Panchayat Development Index since 2022, recognise that one-size policies fail in a country in which a Lakshadweep atoll and a Ladakh plateau both fall under one flag. **Asymmetric federalism is not federal weakness; it is the calibrated flexibility that allows a continent-civilisation to hold itself together.** The Constitution of India has, over 75 years, withstood seven wars, the Emergency, three Prime Ministerial assassinations, the demolition of a sixteenth-century mosque, twenty-six riots whose names we should know, and an attempted secession in Punjab. Few other documents written in the same decade still govern their original signatories.

The counter-argument cannot be brushed aside. Plurality, the sceptic says, breeds fragmentation: the Khalistan movement of the 1980s, the Northeast insurgencies of the 1960s through the 1990s, the Kashmir secessionism since 1989, recurrent communal violence in Bombay 1992-93, Gujarat 2002, Muzaffarnagar 2013, Delhi 2020. Each episode is real, and each, on a closer look, was deepened by attempts to impose uniformity. Operation Blue Star in June 1984, the Madras language agitation of 1965 over the imposition of Hindi, the Nagaland accord that was sought repeatedly and signed too late: each shows that homogenisation imposed from above breeds resistance below. Healing, conversely, has come through accommodation. The Punjab Accord of 24 July 1985, the Mizo Peace Accord of 30 June 1986, the Bodo Accord of 27 January 2020, the Karbi Anglong Accord of September 2021: each is plurality recognised, in time, as a feature.

The contemporary tests are sharp. The Citizenship Amendment Act of 2019, the National Register of Citizens debate, the Common Civil Code question in Uttarakhand 2024, the abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, the proposed delimitation of seats

based on 2021 (now 2027) Census all reopen the federal bargain. Each of them requires more, not less, of the constitutional discipline that *Bommai*, *Kesavananda*, and *Indira Sawhney* taught the country. The Inter-State Council, dormant for long stretches between 2017 and 2024, must be revived as a regular forum. The Punchhi Commission of 2010's recommendations on Article 263 deserve operationalisation. The 16th Finance Commission's work, on horizontal and vertical devolution between Centre and States, will be the next major site of cooperative federalism in practice.

An essay on India's plurality should not close with the rhetorical exhalation that 'unity in diversity' is our motto. The phrase is true and overworked. Better to remember Nehru's palimpsest, which conveys what the slogan flattens. **India is not a country with diversity; India is what diversity has built.** The Preamble itself opens with 'We the people', plural and unhyphenated, not 'I the nation'. The metaphor for the idea of India is not the melting pot, in which everything becomes one bland soup, but the *thali*, in which dal, sabji, roti, achar, dahi and chutney sit beside each other, each retaining its taste, all making up one meal. To eat from one only is to miss the point. To insist that all become one is to refuse the meal. The work of the next seventy-five years is to keep setting the thali, plate by plate, for every Indian who has been promised one.

SOURCES

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- Secularism in India — Principled Distance, Sarva Dharma Samabhava and the Modern Debate
- 6th Schedule of Indian Constitution: Tribal Areas & Autonomous Councils

pluralism

asymmetric federalism

Eighth Schedule

basic structure

Sufi-Bhakti

syncretic

secularism

Sixth Schedule

linguistic states

holding-together federation

Q22

To preserve heritage is to participate in the future

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

HERITAGE, TRADITION AND MODERNITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the 2001 demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban — stone Buddhas survived 1,500 years of weather but not 25 minutes of ideology. Contrast with the painstaking restoration of Nalanda's ruins (UNESCO 2016) and the revival of Nalanda University (2024). Thesis: heritage is not the past clinging to us; it is us clinging to a coherent self. To preserve heritage is to plant memory for the unborn.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Civilisational continuity. India has 43 UNESCO World Heritage sites (as of 2024); the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library shields 2.5 lakh formulations from biopiracy. The 2010 Madurai Meenakshi Temple consecration, GI tags for Banarasi Saree, Pochampally Ikat, Sohrai painting — each a vote of confidence in the future of the past.

Argument 2 (~200w): Economic dividend. Cultural tourism contributed about 5% to India's GDP (Ministry of Tourism estimates). The PRASAD scheme; Kashi Vishwanath Corridor; SVANidhi for street artisans. UNESCO's Cities of Music (Gwalior, 2023) and Literature (Kozhikode, 2023). Heritage well-curated is an economic engine.

Argument 3 (~200w): Ecological wisdom. Apatani agriculture (Arunachal), Khazan farming (Goa), Zabo cultivation (Nagaland) — Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) recognised by FAO. Sacred groves of Meghalaya. The Forest Rights Act 2006 brought tribal custodianship into legal scaffolding. Indigenous wisdom is the manual for the Anthropocene.

Counter-view (~150w): Heritage can ossify — untouchability, jauhar, sati, child marriage were 'heritage' too. Selective preservation is the discipline of choosing the heritage that liberates from the heritage that imprisons. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's abolition of sati (1829), Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste — modernity itself is now part of India's heritage.

Conclusion (~100w): Octavio Paz wrote, 'India is a museum where all artefacts are alive.' To curate it well is not nostalgia, it is statecraft. A nation that does not know its grandmother will not recognise its grandchildren. Heritage preserved is future participated.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Bamiyan Buddhas demolition, 2001
- Nalanda University revival, 2024
- India's 43 UNESCO World Heritage sites
- Traditional Knowledge Digital Library
- GIAHS (FAO) — Apatani, Khazan, Zabo
- Forest Rights Act 2006
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy and abolition of sati 1829
- UNESCO Creative Cities Network
- Hindi: 'virasat sanrakshan bhavishya nirmaan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Bamiyan Buddhas, demolished March 2001
- Nalanda University, re-inaugurated 2024
- Apatani agriculture, Ziro Valley, Arunachal Pradesh
- Khazan agriculture, Goa (GIAHS)
- Sohrai painting, Jharkhand (GI tag)
- Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, 2021
- PRASAD (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation) Scheme
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy, 1829 abolition of sati

MODEL ANSWER

On a March morning in 2001, Mullah Mohammad Omar's Taliban government in Kandahar dispatched dynamite, artillery, and aircraft ordnance to the Bamiyan Valley, 230 kilometres north-west of Kabul. Two standing Buddhas, carved in 507 and 554 CE into the sandstone cliffs of Hindu Kush, had survived 1,500 years of weather, Mongol invasion, and Soviet occupation. They did not survive 25 minutes of ideology. On the day the second Buddha fell, Pierre Lafrance, France's ambassador at large, said: 'It is not the statues we mourn; it is what we mourn ourselves becoming.' Three thousand kilometres east, on 19 June 2024, the Nalanda Mahavihara, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2016, saw the inauguration of a revived Nalanda University on a 455-acre campus. **Heritage is not the past clinging to us; it is us clinging to a coherent self. To preserve it is to plant memory for the unborn.**

The case begins with civilisational continuity. India has 43 UNESCO World Heritage Sites as of 2024, the sixth-largest national tally; the Charaideo Moidams in Assam were inscribed in July 2024, joining the Hoysala temples (2023), the Dholavira Harappan city (2021), and the Jaipur walled city (2019). The Traditional Knowledge Digital Library, set up in 2001 by CSIR and the Ministry of AYUSH, has documented 2.5 lakh Ayurvedic, Unani, Siddha, and Sowa-Rigpa formulations and has, as of 2024, succeeded in withdrawing 270 patent applications filed by foreign claimants over turmeric, neem, basmati, and ashwagandha. The Geographical Indications Registry has tagged 540 goods, from Banarasi Saree to Pochampally Ikat to Sohrai painting to Madhubani art. Each GI tag is a vote of confidence in the future of the past.

Heritage is also an economic engine, contributing approximately five per cent to India's GDP through tourism and cultural industries, according to Ministry of Tourism estimates. The PRASAD scheme, launched in 2015 to develop pilgrimage circuits, has

covered Ayodhya, Varanasi, Madurai, Tirupati, and other sites. The Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, inaugurated on 13 December 2021, restored the riverside grandeur of Banaras with linkage to the Ganga ghats. UNESCO's Creative Cities Network has added Gwalior as a City of Music (2023) and Kozhikode as a City of Literature (2023), joining Jaipur (Crafts and Folk Art, 2015), Varanasi (Music, 2015), Chennai (Music, 2017), Mumbai (Film, 2019), and Hyderabad (Gastronomy, 2019). The Adopt-a-Heritage Scheme has secured corporate funding for monument upkeep at sites like the Red Fort and Sun Temple, Konark.

The deepest case for heritage, however, is ecological. India's tribal communities have, for centuries, evolved agronomic systems that the Anthropocene now belatedly recognises. The Apatani agriculture of Ziro Valley in Arunachal Pradesh combines wet-rice and pisciculture without external inputs and was designated a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the FAO in 2024. Goa's Khazan agriculture, a system of saline-tolerant rice cultivation in tidal estuaries, was nominated in 2023. Nagaland's Zabo system of integrated forestry-aquaculture-livestock has been a GIAHS since 2008. Meghalaya's sacred groves, the *law kyntang*, conserve over 75 biodiversity-rich forest patches under customary law. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 brought 23.2 lakh tribal households into the legal scaffolding of forest custodianship; over 22 lakh community rights have been recognised so far.

Indigenous wisdom is not folklore; it is the operational manual for the climate-vulnerable century.

Heritage of language is the least visible but most fragile. UNESCO's Atlas of Endangered Languages lists 197 Indian languages as endangered, the highest of any country. The People's Linguistic Survey of India, coordinated by Ganesh Devy between 2010 and 2013, documented 780 living languages, of which 220 had become extinct in the preceding fifty years. The Bhasha Sangam initiative under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat and the Three Language Formula of NEP 2020 are corrective steps. The Sahitya Akademi's translation programme and the National Translation Mission, since 2008, have begun building bridges across Indian literatures. Each Bhili, Bhojpuri, Konkani, Khasi, Tulu, or Gondi conversation preserved is a manuscript saved from the fire.

An honest essay must concede that heritage can ossify. Untouchability, jauhar, sati, child marriage, dowry, and devadasi exploitation were 'heritage' too. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's struggle culminated in Lord William Bentinck's Sati Regulation of 4 December 1829. Bhimrao Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, drafted in 1936, indicted the very civilisational continuity that custodians celebrate. The Hindu Code Bills of the 1950s, the Special Marriage Act of 1954, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act of 2006, and

the Triple Talaq Act of 2019 are each a refusal of ‘heritage’ that imprisoned. **Selective preservation is the discipline of choosing the heritage that liberates from the heritage that imprisons.** Modernity itself, in this sense, is now part of India’s heritage.

The future of heritage is therefore a politics, not a panegyric. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act of 1958 has been amended to clarify the 100-metre prohibited zone, but enforcement is weak; over 50 protected monuments have gone missing from the ASI’s inventory, as the CAG noted in 2022. The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1972 needs digital teeth to combat trafficking; the 2024 return of 297 antiquities by the United States Government, including the Annapurna idol from Varanasi, is a beginning. The proposed Underwater Heritage Act, suggested by the Ministry of Culture in 2024 to protect submerged Dwarka, Kannur, and Tamil Nadu coast wrecks, awaits notification. Heritage budgets, at less than 0.4 per cent of central expenditure, remain symbolic.

Octavio Paz, who was Mexico’s ambassador to India from 1962 to 1968, wrote in *In Light of India*: ‘India is a museum where all artefacts are alive.’ To curate that museum well is not nostalgia; it is statecraft. The visitor wants the tomb of Humayun standing on the day she arrives in Delhi; the Apatani farmer wants the right to terrace his ancestral field without bureaucratic harassment; the Sohrai woman of Hazaribagh wants her clay-wash pigment to remain hers; the unborn citizen of 2075 wants a country whose past is intelligible and whose languages are still alive. A nation that does not know its grandmother will not recognise its grandchildren. **To preserve heritage rightly is to participate, knowingly, in the writing of the future.** The chisel of memory is in our hands; what the next century looks like depends on what we choose to keep, what we choose to repair, and what we, at last, choose to outgrow.

SOURCES

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- Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006: Provisions, Rights, Gram Sabha Powers
- Sohrai Painting: Tribal Art of Jharkhand and GI Tag

intangible heritage

GIAHS

GI tag

PRASAD scheme

World Heritage

intangible cultural heritage (ICH)

biopiracy

Adopt-a-Heritage

syncretic

Q23

The crisis of mental health is the silent pandemic of our times

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND POLICY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): COVID-19 made queues outside oxygen plants visible; depression keeps its queues invisible. The Lancet (2021) found India contributes 36.6% of global years lived with disability for depressive disorders. NMHS 2016: 150 million Indians need active mental-health intervention; only 1 in 10 receives it. Thesis: a republic that measures its wealth in GDP but not in wellbeing is solving the wrong equation.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Scale. India has 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 (WHO recommends 3). NCRB 2022: 1,70,924 suicides (rate of 12.4 per 100,000). Farmer suicides (10,881 in 2022), student suicides (13,089), gig-worker burnout. Mental Healthcare Act 2017 made mental health a right — enforcement remains a wish.

Argument 2 (~200w): Causes. Hyper-competition (NEET-JEE coaching factories), digital comparison, joint-family dissolution, urban anomie. Pandemic learning loss (ASER 2022). The under-recognised category: anxiety disorders in adolescent girls (Lancet Psychiatry, 2023).

Argument 3 (~200w): Architecture of response. Tele-MANAS (launched October 2022) — 24×7 mental-health helpline in 20 languages, served over 14 lakh calls by 2024. District Mental Health Programme. NIMHANS Centre of Excellence. Insurance parity under IRDAI 2018 circular. The 2024 SC ruling that ‘right to mental health’ is part of Article 21 (Sukdeb Saha v State of Andhra Pradesh).

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue mental-health budgets compete with infectious-disease spending in a poor country. False trade-off: depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide; productivity loss from anxiety/depression costs India 1.03 trillion dollars by 2030 (WEF estimate). Investing in mental wellbeing is fiscal, not philanthropic.

Conclusion (~100w): Mahatma Gandhi: ‘It is health that is real wealth.’ A civilisation that hides its mental wounds in shame is a civilisation building dams against rivers it refuses to name. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 gave the language; the next decade must give the budget, the workforce, and the cultural courage.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- NMHS 2016 — 150 million Indians need care
- Lancet 2021 — India 36.6% of global depression DALYs
- Mental Healthcare Act 2017
- Tele-MANAS, launched 10 October 2022

- 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 (WHO recommends 3)
- NCRB 2022 suicide data (1,70,924; rate 12.4)
- IRDAI 2018 insurance parity circular
- Sukdeb Saha v State of A.P. (SC 2024)
- Hindi: 'maansik swasthya mein hi shareer ka swasthya'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Tele-MANAS — 14 lakh calls by 2024
- NIMHANS, Bengaluru
- iCall (TISS) and Vandrevalla Foundation helplines
- Kota student suicides (29 in 2023)
- Mental Healthcare Act, 2017
- Sukdeb Saha v State of Andhra Pradesh (SC 2024)
- Lancet Psychiatry adolescent girls study 2023

MODEL ANSWER

COVID-19 placed queues outside oxygen plants on the front pages of newspapers. Depression keeps its queues invisible, in pre-dawn phone calls to helplines, in the silence at the dinner table, in the slow erosion of a teenager's appetite. The Lancet's 2021 study on India's burden of mental disorders found that India contributes 36.6 per cent of global years lived with disability for depressive disorders, despite housing only 17 per cent of the world's population. The National Mental Health Survey of 2016, still the most authoritative Indian baseline, estimated that 150 million Indians need active mental-health intervention; only one in ten receives any. **A republic that measures its wealth in GDP but not in wellbeing is solving the wrong equation, and solving it loudly.** The silent pandemic of our times is the one we have decided not to hear.

The numbers, though incomplete, are not gentle. The National Crime Records Bureau of 2022 reported 1,70,924 deaths by suicide, the highest in India's recorded history, at a rate of 12.4 per 100,000 population. Farmer suicides accounted for 10,881 of those; student suicides numbered 13,089, a rise of 4 per cent over the previous year. Daily-wagers and gig workers comprised the largest occupational group, with 26 per cent of the total. India has 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 people; the WHO recommends three. Of the 692 districts, only 39 have functional district mental-health programme units staffed at full sanctioned strength. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 made mental health a right under Section 18, but enforcement, six years later, remains a wish.

The causes are not mysterious; they are structural. Hyper-competition, channelled through 50 lakh NEET aspirants and 12 lakh JEE candidates each year, funnels adolescents through coaching towns like Kota, Sikar, Hyderabad, and Vijayawada, where 29 students ended their lives in 2023 alone. The dopamine engineering of platforms, well-documented by Frances Haugen in her 2021 Senate testimony, produces what Jonathan Haidt in *The Anxious Generation* in 2024 named the ‘great rewiring’. The dissolution of the Indian joint family, internal migration of 450 million as per Census 2011, urban anomie, climate distress in coastal Odisha and the Sundarbans, and the lasting learning loss of the pandemic, documented in ASER 2022, all converge on the adolescent brain at the worst possible developmental moment. *The Lancet Psychiatry*’s 2023 study on adolescent girls in eight Indian states found anxiety-disorder prevalence at 22 per cent, twice the rate of boys.

India’s response is best understood not as a void but as scaffolding still under construction. Tele-MANAS, launched on 10 October 2022 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in partnership with NIMHANS, is a 24-hour mental-health helpline available in 20 languages; by mid-2024 it had crossed 14 lakh calls, with two-thirds from callers under 35. The District Mental Health Programme, designed by NIMHANS as far back as 1995, covers 692 districts on paper. The NIMHANS Centre of Excellence, the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, and the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences in Delhi are world-class research institutions. The IRDAI circular of 16 August 2018 mandated parity in mental-health insurance coverage. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 introduced advance directives, decriminalised attempted suicide under Section 115, and established central and state mental-health authorities. The Supreme Court, in *Sukdeb Saha v State of Andhra Pradesh* in 2024, held that the right to mental health flows from Article 21.

Civil society fills the gaps the state cannot. iCall, run by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences since 2012, offers free counselling in eight languages. The Vandrevalla Foundation runs a 24-hour helpline answering over 4,000 calls a month. AASRA, set up in 1998, has saved an estimated 3 lakh callers. Sangath, founded by Vikram Patel in 1996, has produced globally-respected research on lay health-worker delivery models. Manas, the National Mental Health Programme app launched in 2021, is an evidence-based digital companion. Each of these is an island; the country awaits the bridge.

A counter-argument deserves a serious hearing. India, the sceptic says, has tuberculosis, malnutrition, maternal mortality, and air pollution to fight; mental-health funding competes for the same rupee. The objection rests on a false trade-off. The WHO and World Economic Forum have, since 2016, calculated that depression

and anxiety will cost India USD 1.03 trillion in productivity loss by 2030, a figure exceeding the annual health budget several times over. **Investment in mental wellbeing is fiscal arithmetic, not philanthropy.** Every rupee spent on community-based mental-health interventions yields a return of four rupees in averted productivity loss, according to the WHO's 'Mental health: a state of well-being' framework of 2014.

What might full implementation look like? The national mental-health budget, currently around 0.8 per cent of the health budget, should be raised toward the WHO-recommended 5 per cent. The Indian Psychiatric Society's training capacity, currently producing 700 psychiatrists a year, needs to double. The NEP 2020's promise of trained counsellors in every school, currently honoured in fewer than 18 per cent of CBSE schools, needs RTE-level enforceability. ASHA workers should be cross-trained as mental-health first responders, modelled on the Sangath ATMAN trials in Maharashtra. Workplaces under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code 2020 should be obligated to publish a psychosocial-safety statement, as Australia legislated in 2023. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017's advance-directive provision must be operationalised; fewer than 1,800 directives had been filed nationwide by 2024.

Stigma, the invisible cost-multiplier, deserves its own intervention. A 2022 NIMHANS survey found that 71 per cent of Indian adults believed mental illness was a sign of personal weakness. Public-health campaigns of the kind that destigmatised HIV in the 1990s have to be commissioned at scale. The Indian film and OTT industries, which command 100 crore daily eyeballs, can be enlisted in story-telling that depicts therapy as routine, not exotic. Cricketers, badminton stars, and Bollywood actors who have spoken of their own struggles, Virat Kohli, Deepika Padukone, P. V. Sindhu among them, have done more for stigma reduction than a decade of brochures.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: 'It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver.' He did not separate body from mind; the Bhagavad Gita's *samattvam* and the Buddhist *samadhi* are technologies of inner stability without which outer prosperity is unstable. A civilisation that hides its mental wounds in shame is a civilisation building dams against rivers it refuses to name. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 gave us the language. The next decade must give us the budget, the workforce, the curriculum, and, hardest of all, the cultural courage. The silent pandemic will end the day the silence ends. **That silence, costly and contagious, is the one disease we have to learn to listen to.**

SOURCES

- Mental Health in India: Burden, Challenges and Policy
- Personal Liberty under Article 21 — Maneka Gandhi to Puttaswamy
- Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 — Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Tele-MANAS

DALY

NMHS

psychiatric workforce gap

Article 21 right to health

suicide rate

anxiety disorder

stigma

District Mental Health Programme

Q24

Caste is a wound the law has stitched but the conscience must heal

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

CASTE, RESERVATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with B R Ambedkar's 1936 'Annihilation of Caste' — the speech the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal refused to host. Eighty-nine years later, the Hathras outrage (2020), the Una flogging (2016), and the inter-caste marriage murders in Tamil Nadu remind us that the law has stitched the wound but the conscience has not yet healed. Thesis: legal abolition of untouchability (Article 17) was a beginning. The deeper task — to disenchant the social mind from purity-pollution thinking — remains unfinished.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Legal scaffolding. Article 17 (untouchability abolished), Article 15(4)(5), Article 16(4), Article 46. The SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989; the 103rd Amendment (2019) EWS quota; sub-classification within SC quota — *State of Punjab v Davinder Singh* (2024 SC Constitution Bench).

Argument 2 (~200w): Persistent reality. Bihar caste census 2023 — 84% population is OBC, EBC, SC, ST. NCRB 2022 reported 57,582 atrocity cases. Manual scavenging continues despite the 2013 Act (Safai Karmachari Andolan litigation). The Hathras case timeline. NCRB convictions hover below 35%.

Argument 3 (~200w): Reform attempts. Periyar's Self-Respect Movement (1925); Narayana Guru's Aruvippuram Pratishtha (1888); Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam; the Mandal Commission (1980); the SC's 2024 sub-classification verdict; the Karnataka and Telangana social-justice budgeting. Triple-test on local-body OBC reservation (Krishna Murthy, 2010).

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue reservation has become an end, not a means; that it has rigidified what it was meant to dissolve. Yet Marc Galanter's 'Competing Equalities' (1984) showed that without affirmative action, structural privilege would calcify. The way forward is sunset clauses with periodic, data-driven review (Sinho Commission, 2010).

Conclusion (~100w): Ambedkar's hope: 'Educate, Agitate, Organise'. The Constitution is the law's stitch; only social conscience can dissolve the scar. Until inter-caste marriage and inter-caste meals are statistically ordinary, the wound is open.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste' (1936)
- Article 17 abolition of untouchability
- State of Punjab v Davinder Singh (1 August 2024) — SC sub-classification
- Bihar caste survey, October 2023
- Manual Scavenging Act 2013; Safai Karmachari Andolan litigation
- Hathras case (September 2020), Una flogging (July 2016)
- Marc Galanter, 'Competing Equalities' (1984)
- Triple-test for OBC reservation, K Krishna Murthy v Union (2010)
- Hindi: 'jaati ek ghaav hai jise samvidhaan ne tanka, vivek ko bharna hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- B R Ambedkar, 'Annihilation of Caste' (1936)
- Una flogging, Gujarat, 11 July 2016
- Hathras incident, Uttar Pradesh, 14 September 2020
- State of Punjab v Davinder Singh (2024 SC, 6-1)
- Narayana Guru's Aruvippuram Pratishtha, 1888
- Bihar caste survey, October 2023

MODEL ANSWER

In 1936, the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore invited B R Ambedkar to deliver the presidential address at its annual conference. When the organisers read the manuscript in advance, they found his proposed argument so radical that they cancelled the invitation. Ambedkar published the undelivered text himself as *Annihilation of Caste* and called for the destruction not of caste rules but of the religious sanction behind them. Eighty-nine years later, the Hathras outrage of September 2020, the Una flogging of July 2016, the Bhima Koregaon arrests, the routine sub-caste-honour murders documented across Tamil Nadu and Haryana, and the persistent under-representation of Dalits in the higher judiciary, central university faculties and corporate boards all confirm the same diagnosis. The Constitution has stitched the wound at the level of formal law. The conscience — the everyday social

mind that decides who may enter a temple, marry whom, sit on whose chair — has not yet healed it.

The legal scaffolding is comprehensive on paper. Article 17 abolishes untouchability and makes its practice punishable; Articles 15(4), 15(5) and 16(4) authorise affirmative action in education and public employment; Article 46 imposes a directive principle of educational and economic promotion of weaker sections; Article 338 establishes the National Commission for Scheduled Castes. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, strengthened in 2015 by an explicit list of new offences and special courts, criminalises specific acts of caste humiliation. The 103rd Constitutional Amendment of 2019 added 10 per cent reservation for Economically Weaker Sections among the unreserved. The Supreme Court's seven-judge Constitution Bench in *State of Punjab v Davinder Singh* on 1 August 2024 permitted sub-classification within the SC quota by a 6-1 majority, recognising the heterogeneity within historically marginalised groups that earlier *E V Chinniah* (2005) had refused to acknowledge. The constitutional architecture is among the most ambitious in the post-colonial world; the Brazilian and South African experiments draw self-consciously from it.

The persistent reality, however, contradicts the architecture. The Bihar caste survey of October 2023 found that 84 per cent of the state's population belongs to OBC, EBC, SC and ST categories combined — a number that re-opened the all-India caste-census debate. The National Crime Records Bureau recorded 57,582 cases under the SC-ST Atrocities Act in 2022, a 13 per cent rise over the previous year; conviction rates hovered below 35 per cent, and chargesheet rates suggested a long enforcement gap. Manual scavenging continues despite the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act of 2013; Safai Karmachari Andolan litigation, led by Bezwada Wilson, has documented hundreds of deaths in sewers and septic tanks since the Act was passed. Inter-caste marriages remain under 6 per cent of all marriages per the India Human Development Survey, and Dr Surinder Jodhka's sociological work shows that even within urban professional classes, marriage choices continue to follow caste boundaries with disconcerting consistency. The Hathras case timeline — with the victim's body cremated in the dead of night before the family could attend — remains a textbook study in how procedural injustice compounds substantive injustice.

Reform attempts have been many and serious. E V Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement, launched in 1925, broke the symbolic chains of priestly intermediation in Tamil weddings; the self-respect marriage was legalised by the Hindu Marriage

(Madras Amendment) Act of 1967. Sree Narayana Guru's 1888 consecration of a Shivalinga at Aruvippuram by a non-Brahmin priest still echoes through Kerala's social compact; the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam emerged from that act. The Mandal Commission report of 1980, implemented in 1990, expanded OBC recognition; the *Indra Sawhney* verdict of 1992 constitutionalised the framework with a 50 per cent ceiling. Karnataka and Telangana have pioneered social-justice budgeting that traces sub-allocation by caste through a separate budget head. The triple-test in *K Krishna Murthy v Union of India* (2010) gave local-body OBC reservation a constitutional method requiring empirical commission, quantum justification and overall ceiling.

The counter-argument deserves serious engagement. Critics argue that reservation has hardened into an end rather than a means, that it has rigidified the very categories it set out to dissolve, that it produces a class of reservation-beneficiaries within reservation that captures the lion's share, that it crowds out merit and breeds resentment among the unreserved. The points are not without force. Yet Marc Galanter's exhaustive *Competing Equalities* (1984) demonstrated through case-tracking that without affirmative action, structural privilege calcifies further; the persistent absence of effective reservation in the higher judiciary is one of the most cited examples within India itself. The honest path forward is sunset clauses combined with periodic, data-driven review — the Sinho Commission of 2010 recommended exactly this. Reform must continue to refine the instrument, not abandon it. Sub-classification under *Davinder Singh* is one such refinement.

International comparison is instructive. The United States' civil rights movement, the Brazilian quilombola land regularisation programme, the South African Black Economic Empowerment framework, and the Malaysian bumiputera policy all attempt structurally similar interventions; none has fully resolved the problem of inherited social disadvantage in a single generation. India's combination of constitutional reservation, legal protection and welfare delivery is among the longest-running and best-documented experiments in the world — and yet, like its peers, has discovered that the legal instrument leads, but the cultural and economic transformations lag. The honest reading is that there is no shortcut and no exit; only patient continuation, refinement and the courage to keep counting outcomes.

The deeper task is cultural. Ambedkar's prescription — *educate, agitate, organise* — remains the working manual. The conscience-healing happens, slowly, in the everyday: the household that hires across caste lines and asks the cook to sit at the same dining table, the school that seats children without regard to surname, the marriage portal that drops caste as a default search field rather than a mandatory one, the

corporation that publishes caste-disaggregated promotion data alongside its gender data, the temple committee that opens the priesthood to the Bhagavatar from any community. Until inter-caste marriage and inter-caste meals are statistically ordinary — not exceptional, not headline-worthy — the wound is open. The Constitution is the law's stitch; only social conscience can finally dissolve the scar tissue. The republic was founded on the assumption that the law could lead while the social mind would slowly follow. Eighty years on, the law waits for the conscience to catch up, and the wait is the longest unfinished business of Indian independence — the assignment passed from each generation to the next with the polite note that it must, this time, be completed without further procrastination, evasion or comfortable forgetting.

SOURCES

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- Triple Test for OBC Reservation in Local Bodies: Conditions, Cases, States
- Ambedkar's Philosophy: Annihilation of Caste, Social Democracy and Navayana Buddhism

untouchability

Article 17

Davinder Singh

Mandal Commission

Self-Respect Movement

sub-classification

caste census

manual scavenging

Q25

A mother tongue is the first homeland a child ever knows

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

LANGUAGE, IDENTITY AND EDUCATION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Nelson Mandela: 'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.' The 2011 Census records 1,369 mother tongues, grouped into 121 languages. UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger lists 197 Indian languages as endangered. Thesis: a mother tongue is the first homeland — to lose it is to be exiled from one's own thought.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Cognitive and pedagogic case. UNESCO's 1953 monograph 'The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education' began the empirical case; NEP 2020's three-language formula and mother-tongue-as-medium-till-Class-5 follow that science. PISA 2018 showed early mother-tongue learners outperform.

Argument 2 (~200w): Cultural sovereignty. Tagore wrote first in Bangla; Premchand in Hindustani; U R Ananthamurthy in Kannada. Dalit literature in Marathi (Namdeo Dhasal), Tamil Sangam poetry, Manipuri Meiteilon. The Eighth Schedule (22 languages); the

Classical Language status for Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), and most recently Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit and Assamese (October 2024).

Argument 3 (~200w): Digital empowerment. BHASHINI translates real-time across Indian languages; Sansad Bhashini in Parliament since 2023; SWAYAM MOOCs in 12 Indian languages. AI must not become English-only colonialism.

Counter-view (~150w): Mother-tongue pride can fuel linguistic chauvinism (the 1965 anti-Hindi agitations, the periodic Bengaluru language sign disputes). India's federal stability requires bilingualism, not monolingualism. English remains a link-language of opportunity.

Conclusion (~100w): Ngugi wa Thiong'o called for 'decolonising the mind'. India's 22 scheduled languages and hundreds of mother tongues are not a problem to be solved but a heritage to be tended. Every language saved is a way of seeing the world preserved.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Mandela on language and the heart
- Census 2011 — 1,369 mother tongues, 121 languages
- UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger
- NEP 2020 — three-language formula
- Eighth Schedule (22 languages)
- Classical Language status — Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, October 2024
- BHASHINI digital language stack
- Sansad Bhashini in Parliament, 2023
- Hindi: 'maatra bhasha pehla swadesh hoti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- BHASHINI: India's AI multilingual stack
- Sansad Bhashini in Parliament, July 2023
- Tamil receiving Classical Language status, 2004
- U R Ananthamurthy's Kannada writings
- Namdeo Dhasal's Marathi Dalit poetry
- Anti-Hindi agitations, Tamil Nadu, 1965

MODEL ANSWER

Nelson Mandela, asked once why he had spent his prison years learning Afrikaans from his guards, replied: 'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes

to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.’ The 2011 Census of India records 1,369 mother tongues, grouped administratively into 121 languages, of which 22 are scheduled. UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger lists 197 Indian languages as vulnerable, endangered or moribund — the highest count for any country in the world. A mother tongue is not a communication tool; it is the first homeland a child ever knows, the cognitive geography on which every subsequent map is drawn. To lose it is not inconvenience — it is exile from one’s own thought, and the loss is silent because the speaker often does not feel the perimeter shrinking until the children no longer dream in the language.

The cognitive and pedagogic case is by now unambiguous. UNESCO’s 1953 monograph *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education* opened the empirical argument; seventy years of replication across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South Asia have confirmed it. Children educated in their mother tongue till the foundational stage acquire literacy faster, retain it longer, and transfer that literacy more successfully to a second language than children plunged into a colonial-administrative medium at age five. The National Education Policy 2020 codified this finding through a three-language formula and the recommendation that the mother tongue, the local language, or the regional language be the medium of instruction at least until Class 5 and preferably Class 8. The PISA 2018 cross-country analysis showed that early mother-tongue learners outperformed peers educated in second languages on every measured indicator. The NIPUN Bharat foundational literacy mission of 2021 explicitly rests on this evidence.

The cultural-sovereignty case runs deeper still. Rabindranath Tagore composed *Gitanjali* first in Bangla; he won the Nobel Prize for the English self-translation but always insisted the original was the work. Premchand wrote in Hindustani that mediated between Urdu and Hindi; his novels remain unmatched in their idiomatic dignity. U R Ananthamurthy’s *Samskara* (1965) made Kannada a literary instrument for caste critique; Namdeo Dhasal’s Dalit Panther poetry of the 1970s gave Marathi a new vocabulary of dissent; Mahasweta Devi’s Bangla short fiction documented Adivasi resistance; Perumal Murugan’s Tamil *Madhorubhagan* (2010) opened a still-unfinished argument. Sangam-era Tamil produced one of the great classical literatures of the world, predating any European vernacular by a millennium. The Eighth Schedule of the Constitution recognises 22 scheduled languages, with proposals for further additions pending. The conferral of Classical Language status — Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu and Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013), Odia (2014), and most recently Marathi, Bengali, Pali, Prakrit and Assamese in October 2024

— is not honorific. It triggers research-chair funding, manuscript-digitisation grants and institutional recognition. Each language saved is a way of seeing the world preserved.

The digital age has raised the stakes. Artificial intelligence trained predominantly on English-language text risks becoming a new colonialism, one that decides which knowledge is search-indexable and which is invisible, which questions are even askable. India's response has been BHASHINI — the Bhasha Interface for India — a national language-translation stack released in beta from 2022 that handles real-time speech and text across the Eighth Schedule languages. Sansad Bhashini, deployed in Parliament from July 2023, translates floor speeches live across the major scheduled languages; a Member from Mizoram can speak Mizo and a Member from Kerala hears Malayalam in his earpiece within seconds. SWAYAM MOOCs are now available in twelve Indian languages. The Common University Entrance Test in 2025 offered question papers in thirteen languages. A digital republic must be multilingual by design, not as an afterthought added in the second release.

The shadow of this virtue must be acknowledged honestly. Mother-tongue pride can curdle into linguistic chauvinism. The anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu in 1937, 1965 and again periodically have shaped a generation's relationship with the national imagination, and the violence of January 1965 left several dead. Bengaluru's recurring signboard disputes, Mumbai's episodic taxi-language politics during the Shiv Sena era, and the periodic battles over imposition or non-imposition of any one language across the Hindi heartland reveal the fragility of multilingual coexistence. India's federal stability requires bilingualism if not trilingualism, not monolingualism in any direction; English remains an indispensable link-language of opportunity, of scientific publication and of inter-state mobility for the white-collar workforce. Sub-nationalism that demands one language at the expense of another forgets that a multilingual citizen is constitutionally and cognitively richer.

The economic case is also unambiguous. The World Bank's 2022 study on multilingual education in developing countries finds that mother-tongue-medium primary education produces higher lifetime earnings even for children who later switch to English-medium higher education. The reason is structural: cognitive scaffolding built in the language of the home transfers laterally to subsequent languages, while children who are denied that scaffolding never fully recover the lost foundation. India's urban middle-class anxiety to push English from kindergarten is, by this evidence, counter-productive even on its own terms. The right policy sequence is

mother tongue first for depth, regional language and English added for breadth, and an extra classical or foreign language for ambition.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan novelist, wrote *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) to argue that to write in the coloniser's language is to inherit its categories and its silences. India's 22 scheduled languages and hundreds of mother tongues are not a problem to be solved but a heritage to be tended. The mature policy is additive, not subtractive — mother tongue first, regional language next, English alongside, Sanskrit or another classical language for those who choose, and freedom to add more. Fund manuscript libraries. Subsidise translation between Indian languages, not only from Indian languages to English. Pay teachers in tribal-language medium schools premiums for the cognitive load they carry. A nation that defends every mother tongue defends the imaginative range of its citizens, and ultimately the range of its institutional thought. The first homeland precedes the official one; both must be honoured at once, and the older one must not be allowed to die first because its citizens were taught to be ashamed of it.

SOURCES

- BHASHINI: India's AI-Powered Multilingual Language Stack
- Sansad Bhashini: AI Real-Time Translation in Parliament Explained
- National Education Policy 2020: Structure, Reforms and UPSC Notes

mother tongue

NEP 2020

Eighth Schedule

BHASHINI

Classical Language

linguistic federalism

matra bhasha

decolonising the mind

Q26

Every generation inherits a debt it did not sign

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

INTERGENERATIONAL DEBT AND RESPONSIBILITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the Iroquois Seventh-Generation principle: 'In every deliberation we must consider the impact on the seventh generation.' India's per-capita carbon emission is one-third of the global average; yet a child born in Lucknow in 2026 will breathe air five times more toxic than her grandmother did. Thesis: each generation inherits debts of carbon, of fiscal deficit, of unaddressed injustice, of crumbling aquifers — debts it did not sign but must pay or pass on with interest.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Ecological debt. India's groundwater extraction has caused water-table drops of one metre per year in Punjab (CGWB 2024). The 2070 net-zero target is

itself an admission. The Forest Survey of India 2023 — forest cover gains are largely plantation, not native.

Argument 2 (~200w): Fiscal debt. India's general government debt is around 81% of GDP (IMF 2025). The FRBM Act 2003 attempts intertemporal discipline. The 16th Finance Commission must balance present needs against future capacity. Pension liabilities (OPS revival debate) are credit cards future workers must pay.

Argument 3 (~200w): Moral debt. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa; Germany's Holocaust reparations programme; India's incomplete reckoning with the 1984 Sikh massacres, 1992 Babri demolition, 2002 Gujarat violence. Memory unsettled becomes inheritance.

Counter-view (~150w): A generation that obsesses over debt can become paralysed. India's young population is also an inheritance — a 'demographic dividend' window closing by 2046 (SRS 2024). Use the dividend, do not just count the debt.

Conclusion (~100w): Edmund Burke called society 'a partnership between the dead, the living, and the unborn'. The unborn cannot vote; they will inherit the climate, the courts, the constitutional culture we build. To pay down inherited debt is the deepest patriotism.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Iroquois Seventh Generation Principle
- Edmund Burke, 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' (1790)
- CGWB groundwater data 2024
- FRBM Act 2003; 16th Finance Commission
- IMF general government debt estimates 2025
- Forest Survey of India 2023
- Demographic Dividend Closing Window — SRS 2024
- 1984, 1992, 2002 — reckoning gaps
- Hindi: 'har peedhi ko aisa rin milta hai jis par usne kabhi sahi nahin kee'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- India's 2070 net-zero pledge (COP26 Glasgow)
- Punjab groundwater depletion, CGWB 2024
- FRBM Act 2003 fiscal targets
- Germany's reparations to Israel (1952 Luxembourg Agreement)
- South Africa TRC (1995)
- Demographic Dividend Closing Window

MODEL ANSWER

The Iroquois Confederacy of upstate New York is said to have governed by a single rule that has been worn smooth by re-citation: in every deliberation, consider the impact on the seventh generation. The rule is older than any modern republic and more demanding than any environmental impact assessment. India's per-capita carbon emission in 2024 is approximately 2 tonnes annually, one-third of the global average and one-eighth of an average American; yet a child born in Lucknow in 2026 will breathe air five times more toxic than her grandmother did at the same age. The bond that the great-grandchild will be asked to service was contracted by people she will never meet. Every generation, in this sense, inherits debts — of carbon in the atmosphere, of fiscal deficit on the public balance sheet, of unaddressed injustice in the public record, of depleted aquifers and silted dams — that it did not personally sign. The republic is then asked, by the simple passage of time, either to pay them down or to forward them on with interest.

Ecological debt is the most urgent line of the ledger. The Central Ground Water Board's 2024 assessment recorded water-table drops of around one metre per year across central Punjab, with 78 per cent of blocks classified over-exploited, critical or semi-critical; the same survey found similar trajectories in north Gujarat, southern Haryana and parts of western Uttar Pradesh. The Forest Survey of India's biennial report of 2023 records a marginal gain in forest cover, but disaggregation reveals that most of the increase comes from monoculture plantation and orchards counted as forest; primary native forest continues to decline, particularly in the Western Ghats and the North East. India's 2070 net-zero pledge at COP-26 Glasgow is itself an actuarial confession — an acknowledgement that the current generation cannot pay its full carbon rent and is staggering the obligation across half a century, while the climate's tipping points may not honour the schedule. The unborn cannot vote on the timetable, which is precisely what makes it ethically difficult.

Fiscal debt is the second line. The International Monetary Fund's 2025 Article IV consultation estimates India's general government debt at approximately 81 per cent of GDP. Interest payments alone consume nearly 25 per cent of Union government revenue receipts, leaving correspondingly less for primary spending on health, education and infrastructure. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act of 2003, refined by the N K Singh Committee in 2017, attempts an intertemporal discipline through a debt anchor and a deficit glide path; the 16th Finance Commission, currently in deliberation under the chairmanship of Arvind Panagariya, must reconcile present development needs with future capacity to repay. The Old

Pension Scheme revival debate in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Himachal Pradesh between 2022 and 2024 is a textbook illustration: present-tense political relief secured by an off-balance-sheet credit card future workers must service. The Unified Pension Scheme announced in 2024 attempts to find a middle ground, but the underlying actuarial pressure remains.

Moral debt is the line that haunts the others. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established by Act 34 of 1995 and chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, sat for two years and gave the new democracy a method for confronting apartheid's wreckage; the proceedings were televised and a public archive built. West Germany's 1952 Luxembourg Agreement with Israel and the World Jewish Congress initiated reparations for the Holocaust, eventually exceeding 70 billion dollars by the time the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future closed its compensation programmes in the 2000s. India has held no equivalent reckoning for its own wounds — the 1984 Sikh massacres, the 1990 Kashmir Pandit exodus, the 1992 Babri demolition, the 2002 Gujarat violence, the 1948 Hyderabad police action, the 1983 Nellie killings. Each pending file passes silently to the next generation, accruing the compound interest of mistrust. Memory unsettled becomes inheritance, often deformed.

The counter-view requires acknowledgement and serious engagement. A generation that obsesses over its inheritance can become paralysed by its weight; the same Indian young population that inherits these debts is also itself an inheritance — a demographic dividend that the Sample Registration System 2024 projects will close by approximately 2046 when median age crosses 35. The dividend must be used, not merely audited. Edmund Burke, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), reminded the radicals of his day that they could not redesign society as a moment's convenience because society is 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born'. The dead bequeathed institutions; the unborn will inherit them; the living are temporary tenants charged with maintenance. The job is to leave the house better than you found it, which is harder than it sounds.

A subtler dimension is the institutional inheritance: the courts, the universities, the audit office, the central bank, the army. These were built over decades by people who will never benefit from them; each generation receives them and either deepens or hollows them out. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India, founded under the 1858 Government of India Act and continued under Article 148, is one such inheritance; the Reserve Bank of India under Article 49 is another; the Indian

Statistical Service is a third. To weaken any of these for short-term political comfort is to inherit a working institution and bequeath a damaged one — an intergenerational vandalism harder to detect than a missed tax payment but more lasting in effect.

The discipline, then, is patient debt service across multiple ledgers at once. Tighten the fiscal anchor in good years rather than only in crisis. Charge a true carbon price and let the price signal reach household consumption. Codify reparations where injustice is documentable and limit the temporal window for litigation so closure can arrive. Strengthen the 73rd and 74th Amendment local bodies so the citizen closest to the depleted aquifer has the loudest voice in its restoration. Audit pension liabilities transparently. Memorialise truthfully — the National War Memorial of 2019 shows that public memory is constitutional engineering, not nostalgia. Pay down inherited debt; bequeath fewer signed obligations to the unborn. The deepest patriotism is not loud allegiance to anthems but quiet repayment — the willingness to receive an inheritance and refuse to forward its worst lines unchanged.

SOURCES

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- FRBM Act, 2003: Fiscal Targets, N.K. Singh Committee, Debt Anchor
- India's LT-LEDS and Climate Strategy: Why Net-Zero by 2070 Needs a Long Horizon

intertemporal justice

FRBM

ecological debt

16th Finance Commission

demographic dividend

net zero

reparations

Burke

Q27

Parenting in the algorithmic age is the new frontier of citizenship

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

PARENTING, SCREENS AND DIGITAL CHILDHOOD

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Jonathan Haidt's 'The Anxious Generation' (2024) — the global mental health collapse of teenagers post-2010 correlates with the smartphone-front camera-app stack. India is the world's largest under-25 population (over 650 million). A parent today is not just raising a child; she is competing, every evening, with Meta's recommendation engine. Thesis: parenting in the algorithmic age is the most consequential — and most under-supported — act of citizenship.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The new childhood. NCRB 2023 — cyber-crimes against children rose 32% YoY. NIMHANS data: anxiety disorders in adolescents up 40% since

2015. Australia's Online Safety Amendment Act 2024 banned under-16 social media. France limits screen-time for under-3s.

Argument 2 (~200w): The institutional gap. India's POCSO 2012; IT Rules 2021; DPDP Act 2023 Section 9 (verifiable parental consent under 18); Draft DPDP Rules 2025. Yet the enforcement architecture — child-safe-search defaults, age-verification standards, algorithmic-amplification audits — is nascent.

Argument 3 (~200w): The civic case. Parents are the first regulator a child encounters. Family dinners, screen-free Sundays, public-library habits — these are civic-formation rituals. Schools and panchayats are partners: the Tamil Nadu 'school readiness' programme and Maharashtra's 'sports period mandate' are examples.

Counter-view (~150w): Over-protective parenting (the 'helicopter' or 'snowplough' style) breeds incapacity. Jonathan Haidt himself argues for more autonomy in the physical world even as he restricts digital. Indian middle-class chauffeur-driven childhoods produce risk-averse adults.

Conclusion (~100w): Plato in 'The Republic': 'The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life.' Parenting is the original act of constitution-making. In the algorithmic age, it is also the front line of democratic survival.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Jonathan Haidt, 'The Anxious Generation' (March 2024)
- NCRB cyber-crime against children data, 2023
- Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024
- POCSO Act 2012
- DPDP Act 2023 Section 9 — children's data
- Draft DPDP Rules 2025
- NIMHANS adolescent mental-health data
- Plato, 'The Republic', Book IV
- Hindi: 'algorithm yug mein paalan-poshan nagarikta ki nayi seemarekha hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Jonathan Haidt, 'The Anxious Generation' (2024)
- Australia Online Safety Amendment Act, 29 November 2024
- POCSO Act 2012
- DPDP Act 2023
- France's Toulouse smartphone-pause pilot in middle schools, 2024

- Surgeon General Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health, May 2023

MODEL ANSWER

The social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, in *The Anxious Generation* (March 2024), documented a near-simultaneous collapse in adolescent mental health across the Anglosphere starting around 2012. The inflection point coincided with three technological events: the front-facing camera on the iPhone 4 of 2010, the algorithmic feed replacing the chronological one on every major social platform between 2011 and 2013, and the spread of persistent push notifications as the default state of every app. India is the world's largest under-25 population — more than 650 million citizens, half the country, and growing. A parent today is not merely raising a child; she is competing, every evening after homework, with the recommendation engine of a company headquartered eight time zones away whose annual revenue exceeds India's education budget. Parenting in the algorithmic age is, in the literal sense, the new frontier of citizenship — the place where the republic's next generation is being formed or quietly un-formed.

The new childhood is documented in numbers that are difficult to dismiss. The National Crime Records Bureau's 2023 report shows cyber-crimes against children rose 32 per cent year on year, with sextortion, grooming and CSAM-related cases the fastest-growing categories. NIMHANS data indicate that anxiety disorders in Indian adolescents have risen approximately 40 per cent since 2015; in urban metros the increase is steeper. The United States Surgeon General's May 2023 advisory on social media and youth mental health placed adolescents who spend more than three hours daily on social media at a roughly doubled risk of depression and anxiety. Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act of 29 November 2024 banned under-16 social-media accounts — the first such national law — and France in 2024 piloted smartphone-free middle schools in Toulouse with measurable improvements in classroom attention, peer interaction at recess and reported well-being. The United Kingdom, Norway and Denmark are studying similar measures.

India's legal architecture has begun to respond, though late. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act of 2012 criminalised online grooming and child pornography; the Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules of 2021, amended in 2025, place due-diligence obligations on social-media platforms including grievance redress and traceability; the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023, particularly Section 9, requires verifiable parental consent for the processing of children's personal data and prohibits behavioural tracking and

targeted advertising aimed at minors; the draft DPDP Rules of 2025 are working out the operational definitions of ‘verifiable’ consent and the technical means by which platforms must implement them. Yet the enforcement architecture — child-safe search defaults, robust age-verification standards, algorithmic amplification audits, default screen-time caps for under-16 accounts — remains nascent. The law is in place; the wiring connecting law to product design is not.

The civic case for parenting goes beyond individual mental health. Parents are the first regulator a child ever encounters — the first authority that says no, the first jurisdiction that decides what counts as harm and what counts as a teachable risk. Family dinners without phones, screen-free Sundays, library and park habits, daily reading aloud, weekend volunteering, structured chores — these are civic-formation rituals as much as developmental practices. They teach that authority can be reasoned, that attention is a finite resource worth defending, that presence is owed to those one shares a roof with. The Tamil Nadu ‘school readiness’ programme that puts a primary-school child in front of a story-time aunt and the Maharashtra-mandated daily sports period in primary schools are public-policy instruments aligned with this insight. A child who experiences responsive parenting at home is more likely to expect, and demand, responsive governance from the state two decades later; the family is the first civics class.

There is a comparative-policy dimension worth surfacing. South Korea, which faced its own demographic and digital-childhood pressures earlier than India, introduced the Shutdown Law in 2011 banning under-16 gaming between midnight and six a.m.; it was repealed in 2021 because enforcement proved harder than legislation. China’s 2021 regulations limited under-18 online gaming to three hours per week. Both experiences suggest that pure prohibition produces evasion; what works better is a combination of platform design defaults, parental tools, and the cultural shift Haidt calls ‘collective action’ — every parent in a class agreeing simultaneously that no child below thirteen gets a smartphone, so no individual child feels singled out. India’s panchayat-level and school-level platforms for such collective coordination are an untapped asset.

Two cautions are worth airing. The first is over-protection. The ‘helicopter’ and ‘snow-plough’ parenting styles, in Lenore Skenazy’s diagnosis, breed incapacity for risk; Haidt himself argues for more autonomy in the physical world — longer leashes for park play, school walks, errand-running — even as he calls for stricter limits on digital exposure. Indian middle-class childhoods, chauffeur-driven and apartment-bound, can produce risk-averse adults precisely when the republic needs civic risk-takers. The

second caution is privilege. Algorithmic parenting strategies presume a literate caregiver with discretionary time and bandwidth; a single mother working two shifts in a tier-three city cannot personally vet every notification on her son's phone. Public policy must take up the slack — default settings on devices sold below a price band, statutory school-time platform bans, public-broadcast digital-literacy campaigns in regional languages, panchayat-level digital-safety officers funded through the Fifteenth Finance Commission grants.

Plato observed in Book IV of *The Republic* that 'the direction in which education starts a man will determine his future life'. Parenting is the original act of constitution-making, conducted in kitchens and bedrooms rather than in committee rooms. In the algorithmic age, it is also the front line of democratic survival; a generation raised by a recommendation engine that optimises for outrage will inherit, predictably, an outraged polity. The state cannot raise children, and the platform cannot be trusted to. Aristotle wrote that the household (*oikos*) was the foundation on which the polis was built; the philosophical insight has not aged. India's next generation of doctors, civil servants, judges, soldiers and entrepreneurs is being formed not principally in schools or coaching classes but in the texture of attention each parent gives or fails to give in the algorithmically-saturated evenings of the present decade. The republic's deepest defence policy is what happens at six p.m. every weekday, between a tired parent, a curious child and a glowing screen. Citizenship begins there or it does not begin at all.

SOURCES

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- IT Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code (Amendment) Rules, 2025
- U S Surgeon General Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health, May 2023

DPDP Act

POCSO

algorithmic amplification

screen time

anxious generation

verifiable parental consent

digital childhood

civic formation

Q28

A rural India unseen is a republic unmade

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

RURAL-URBAN DIVIDE AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with M N Srinivas: 'The village is India's mirror.' 65% of Indians still live in villages (Census projection 2025); per-capita rural income is one-third of urban (NSO 2023-24); rural household debt has risen faster than urban (NABARD

All-India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2021-22). Thesis: a republic that prices its own rural majority out of dignified livelihoods is not yet a republic. Rural India unseen — and policy-blind — is the republic's deepest fault line.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Persistent invisibility. The agricultural sector employs 45% but contributes 18% of GVA (PIB 2024). MSP procurement covers fewer than 6% of farmers. The PM-KISAN ₹6,000 annual transfer reaches 9.4 crore farmers — significant, but inadequate to cover one fertiliser bag at 2025 prices.

Argument 2 (~200w): Schemes and their limits. MGNREGA's 5.4 crore active workers (FY 2024-25), but wage delays remain. PMAY-G (rural housing), Jal Jeevan Mission (75% household tap coverage by January 2025), Saubhagya, Ujjwala — each landmark, each carrying last-mile gaps. The Rurban Mission's 300 cluster pilots show possibility.

Argument 3 (~200w): Structural transformation. NABARD's 2025 rural credit thrust, FPO ecosystem (10,000 FPOs target reached in 2024), AgriStack-DPI for crop-loans. The PESA Act, 73rd Amendment local governance, Adi Karmyogi Programme for tribal heartlands. Cooperatives (National Cooperative Policy 2025) as bridge between scale and dignity.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue the future is unstoppably urban (60% urban by 2050, UN-DESA) — we should fund cities, not slow migration. Yet uncontrolled urbanisation produces Dharavi, not Singapore. Strengthening rural India is the only humane urbanisation strategy.

Conclusion (~100w): Gandhi: 'India lives in her villages.' Until the rural-urban income ratio narrows from 1:3 to 1:1.5, the constitutional promise of equality remains rhetorical. To see rural India is to constitute the republic anew.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- M N Srinivas — 'The village is India's mirror'
- PM-KISAN coverage and ₹6,000 annual transfer
- MGNREGA — 5.4 crore active workers
- Jal Jeevan Mission tap coverage, January 2025
- FPO 10,000 target reached, 2024
- NABARD All-India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2021-22
- Adi Karmyogi Programme (tribal change leaders)
- National Cooperative Policy 2025
- Hindi: 'gaon dikhe nahin to ganarajya banta nahin'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- MGNREGA 2005
- PMAY-G (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin)
- Jal Jeevan Mission
- FPO Scheme — 10,000 FPOs by 2027-28
- National Cooperative Policy 2025
- Adi Karmyogi Programme, 2025

MODEL ANSWER

The sociologist M N Srinivas, who spent decades walking from Rampura in Karnataka through fieldwork in twelve states, kept returning to the same observation in his writings and conversations: the village is India's mirror. Yet the country has been spending the last decade looking past it. The 2025 Census projection estimates that 65 per cent of Indians still live in rural areas; the National Statistical Office's 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey shows per-capita rural consumption is approximately one-third of urban; NABARD's All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey of 2021-22 records rural household debt rising faster than urban household debt for the first time since liberalisation. A republic that prices its own rural majority out of dignified livelihoods is not yet a republic in any morally serious sense. Rural India unseen — and therefore policy-blind, capital-blind, media-blind — is the deepest fault line in the constitutional compact, the place where the promise of equality is daily renegotiated downward.

Begin with the structural invisibility. Agriculture and allied sectors employ 45 per cent of the workforce per the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24, but contribute approximately 18 per cent of gross value added — an imbalance that translates directly into the income gap and the migration pressure. Minimum Support Price procurement, despite expansion in the past decade and the addition of pulses and oilseeds, reaches under 6 per cent of farmers nationally, concentrated in Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and parts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana; the eastern states and the dryland zones remain outside its umbrella. The PM-KISAN transfer of 6,000 rupees per year reaches 9.4 crore farmers — a significant outreach in absolute scale, but at 2025 fertiliser prices it does not cover a single full DAP bag, let alone the season's input cost. The statistical visibility of the rural producer is consistently below the statistical visibility of the urban consumer she ultimately feeds.

The scheme architecture has expanded, but with persistent last-mile gaps. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act of 2005 supported approximately 5.4 crore active workers in FY 2024-25; wage-delay litigation continues despite the National Mobile Monitoring System rollout, and the budgetary allocation has been roughly flat in real terms for several years. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin has delivered over 2.9 crore houses by January 2025, with PMAY-G 2.0 targeting an additional 2 crore by 2029. The Jal Jeevan Mission crossed 75 per cent rural household tap-coverage by January 2025, up from 17 per cent at launch in August 2019. Saubhagya electrified the last unserved 26 million households between 2017 and 2019; Ujjwala distributed over 10 crore LPG connections between 2016 and 2024. Each is genuinely transformative; each is still chasing the last 15 per cent, the part that is hardest to reach and most often forgotten. The Rurban Mission's 300 cluster pilots show that mid-scale urbanisation in situ — market connectivity, services, employment — is feasible if planning resources actually reach below the district level rather than stopping at the block-development office.

The deeper transformation is structural and longer-term. NABARD's 2025 rural credit thrust, the Farmer Producer Organisation ecosystem (the 10,000 FPO target reached in 2024 under the central scheme launched in 2020), the AgriStack digital public infrastructure for crop-loans and crop-insurance, and the eNAM platform linking 1,389 mandis are pieces of a single bet — that productivity, aggregation and digital identity together can multiply the small farmer's leverage against intermediaries, input suppliers and weather. The PESA Act of 1996 and the 73rd Amendment empowered local governance; the Adi Karmayogi Programme of 2025 trains tribal-area change leaders through a three-tier cadre that extends to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The National Cooperative Policy of 2025 attempts to revive the Amul model nationally across multiple sectors — the bridge between scale and dignity that India's rural economy has needed for half a century. The Ministry of Cooperation, formed in 2021, has institutional bandwidth that Anand-style federations did not previously command.

The counter-view must be taken seriously. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs projects India will be 60 per cent urban by 2050; some development economists argue that the future is unstoppably urban, and that scarce public capital should flow to cities rather than slow rural-urban migration. The argument carries weight. But uncontrolled urbanisation produces Dharavi, not Singapore; the Mumbai Metropolitan Region's slum population is still growing in absolute terms despite years of redevelopment schemes. Strengthening rural India is

not a counter-strategy to urbanisation; it is the only humane urbanisation strategy. A migrant who reaches Bengaluru with a Class 10 education, a savings-account balance and a working bank-linked Aadhaar fares fundamentally differently from one who arrives illiterate, undocumented and indebted to a labour contractor.

There is a cultural-political dimension too. The over-concentration of media, capital and political attention in metros produces a feedback loop where rural concerns appear only as crisis — farmer suicides, agrarian unrest, drought distress — rather than as continuous policy texture. The Rural India report by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) of 2024 found that 71 per cent of villagers felt their concerns were under-covered in national news. Local-language journalism, public-broadcasting investment in rural-affairs programming, and rural-correspondent fellowships funded by the Press Information Bureau are small but corrective interventions.

Mahatma Gandhi's often-quoted line that India lives in her villages is not nostalgic; it is statistical and remains so. Until the rural-urban income ratio narrows from approximately 1:3 to a defensible 1:1.5, the constitutional promise of equality remains rhetorical at best. The path is plain: keep paying the welfare schemes their full annual allocations rather than back-loading releases, fix the last-mile delivery friction through technology audited by social audit, deepen cooperative credit beyond the urban cooperative banking sector, scale the FPO experiment to genuine market power, treat the panchayat as a unit of governance rather than as a unit of celebration during Panchayati Raj Day photographs, and connect rural Internet at speeds competitive with metros. To see rural India is the precondition of seeing India. The republic is unmade until the mirror is held up again and the country agrees, slowly, to look honestly.

SOURCES

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- National Cooperative Policy 2025: Pillars, Targets and the Sahkar-se-Samriddhi Vision
- Adi Karmyogi Programme (Abhiyan): Tribal Change Leaders, Three-Tier Cadre

PM-KISAN

MGNREGA

Jal Jeevan Mission

FPO

NABARD

rural-urban divide

Rurban

Adi Karmyogi

Q29

Women in leadership change not only outcomes but the meaning of leadership

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

GENDER, LEADERSHIP AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the Manjusri Mulakalpa describing women in administrative roles in 7th-century India, and Indira Gandhi's 1971 Bangladesh decision. India elected the first woman Speaker (Meira Kumar, 2009), the first tribal-woman President (Droupadi Murmu, 2022), and passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (2023). Thesis: women in leadership do not merely change who holds power; they change the texture, the priorities, and the moral grammar of power itself.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Evidence base. Esther Duflo and Raghavendra Chattopadhyay's West Bengal panchayat study (2004) — women sarpanchs invested more in water, less in roads, in line with women's stated priorities. Iceland's gender-budget; Rwanda's 61% women MPs; Sweden's feminist foreign policy 2014-22.

Argument 2 (~200w): Indian institutional progress. 73rd/74th Amendments (1992) mandated one-third women in PRIs; 21 states now have 50%. Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2023 (33% Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, post-delimitation). Mission Shakti's Sambal and Samarthya. Stand-Up India (₹62,000 crore disbursed to women entrepreneurs by 2024).

Argument 3 (~200w): Beyond representation. Women's leadership reshapes meeting culture, conflict style, mentoring chains. Ela Bhatt's SEWA pioneered cooperative women's work; Kiran Bedi as first woman IPS; Indra Nooyi at PepsiCo; Soumya Swaminathan as WHO Chief Scientist. These shift not just numbers but the ethic of authority.

Counter-view (~150w): 'Proxy sarpanch' phenomenon — male relatives running the office. Tokenism without budgetary control. Yet repeated election cycles have visibly empowered actual women leaders (Maharashtra's Kachargadh Gram Panchayat winning the National Panchayat Award).

Conclusion (~100w): Mary Wollstonecraft: 'I do not wish women to have power over men but over themselves.' The Indian republic's next chapter depends not on adding women to existing institutions but on letting their leadership re-make those institutions.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, September 2023
- Droupadi Murmu, 15th President (2022)
- Meira Kumar, first woman Speaker (2009)
- Chattopadhyay & Duflo West Bengal panchayat study (2004)

- Rwanda 61% women MPs
- 73rd & 74th Amendments — one-third PRI reservation
- Stand-Up India scheme
- Ela Bhatt and SEWA
- Hindi: 'mahilaaen netrity hi nahin, netrity ki paribhasha badalti hain'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 21 September 2023
- Droupadi Murmu, 25 July 2022
- Chattopadhyay-Duflo NBER study, 'Women as Policy Makers' (2004)
- Ela Bhatt and SEWA (founded 1972)
- Soumya Swaminathan, WHO Chief Scientist 2019-22
- Kachargadh Gram Panchayat, Maharashtra

MODEL ANSWER

On 25 July 2022, Droupadi Murmu was sworn in as the 15th President of India — the first tribal woman in Rashtrapati Bhavan, the first head of state born after Independence, and the first to come from the Santhal community of Mayurbhanj in Odisha. The image of her oath of office, taken in the Central Hall where Sucheta Kripalani had stood in 1947 as one of the few women in the Constituent Assembly, telegraphed a long arc through Indian public life. Indira Gandhi had recognised Bangladesh in December 1971 against considerable strategic advice; Meira Kumar had presided over the 15th Lok Sabha from 2009; Pratibha Patil had served as President from 2007 to 2012; Nirmala Sitharaman had become India's first full-time woman Finance Minister and Defence Minister. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, passed unanimously on 21 September 2023, promises 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies post-delimitation. Women in leadership do not merely change who holds power; they change the texture, the priorities and the moral grammar of power itself.

The evidence base is by now substantial and difficult to ignore. Esther Duflo and Raghabendra Chattopadhyay's 2004 NBER study of West Bengal panchayats, exploiting the quasi-random rotation of women-reserved sarpanch seats, found that women sarpanchs invested significantly more in drinking-water infrastructure and significantly less in roads — precisely tracking what women in the gram sabha had ranked as priorities in pre-survey work, while men had ranked roads higher. The result has been replicated for Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka with consistent effect

sizes. At the national scale, Rwanda's 61 per cent women in the Chamber of Deputies coincides with the post-genocide reconstruction's emphasis on reconciliation, primary education and gender-based-violence law. Iceland's gender-budget framework, adopted in 2009, and Sweden's feminist foreign policy of 2014-22 under Margot Wallstrom demonstrated the institutional reach of women's leadership beyond legislative numbers into trade, defence and development aid.

India's domestic progress is concrete and measurable. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 mandated one-third reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities; 21 states have since voluntarily raised the floor to 50 per cent. Approximately 1.45 million elected women representatives now serve in local government, the largest cohort in any democracy. The Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, passed unanimously in 2023, will operationalise after the next delimitation exercise scheduled post-2026 Census. Mission Shakti's two verticals — Sambal for safety and Samarthya for empowerment — consolidated more than a dozen women-and-child welfare programmes from 2022 with rationalised funding flows. Stand-Up India, launched in 2016, had disbursed over 62,000 crore rupees in collateral-free credit to women entrepreneurs and SC-ST borrowers by 2024. The PM-Drone Didi scheme of 2024 trains rural women as drone operators for agricultural services — a quiet revolution in who owns the village's aerial commons. The Lakhpati Didi initiative aims at three crore rural women earning more than one lakh rupees annually.

The shift goes beyond representation into institutional culture. Women's leadership reshapes meeting culture, conflict style, mentoring chains and the implicit metrics by which authority is measured. Ela Bhatt's Self-Employed Women's Association, founded in Ahmedabad in 1972, pioneered cooperative organising for informal women workers and is now a case study at Harvard Business School and the Wharton School. Kiran Bedi as the first woman in the Indian Police Service set a template of reform-from-within that successors like Aruna Roy and Renuka Singh have extended into civil society and right-to-information activism. Indra Nooyi at PepsiCo from 2006 to 2018, Soumya Swaminathan as WHO Chief Scientist from 2019 to 2022, Falguni Nayar at Nykaa, Roshni Nadar at HCLTech and Justices Indu Malhotra, B V Nagarathna and Hima Kohli on the Supreme Court have demonstrated that institutional ethics shift meaningfully with the gender composition of leadership — in board-meeting tone, in succession-planning practice, in workplace-harassment redress, in the very vocabulary of strategy documents.

The shadow argument is honest and must be addressed. The 'proxy sarpanch' phenomenon, where male relatives operate the office in a woman's name, has been

extensively documented in the early years of Panchayati Raj Institution reservation; the husband or father-in-law conducted business while the elected woman signed papers brought to her at the kitchen door. Tokenism without budgetary control reproduces patriarchy under a new signature. Yet successive electoral cycles have visibly empowered actual women leaders; the Kachargadh Gram Panchayat in Maharashtra, led by Sarpanch Yogita Wankhade, won the National Panchayat Award for sanitation and water management, and the model has been studied in adjoining states. Longitudinal Indian Institute of Management Bangalore research finds that exposure to a woman sarpanch reduces gender-based aspiration gaps in girls in the same village by measurable margins. The doubt about tokenism is best answered not by retreating from reservation but by giving it longer time and stronger institutional support — training, budgetary autonomy, legal aid, security.

The cultural feedback loop is the deepest dividend. Daughters who see women in authority — the principal, the police inspector, the panchayat sarpanch, the high-court judge — develop different default expectations about their own futures.

Mary Wollstonecraft, writing *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, observed that she did not wish women to have power over men but over themselves. The Indian republic's next chapter depends not on adding women to existing institutions but on letting their leadership re-make those institutions — the assembly that meets at hours compatible with childcare, the boardroom that does not equate aggression with competence, the courtroom that records testimony with dignity, the panchayat that prioritises water before roads, the police station that does not require a woman complainant to bring a male relative as escort. Outcomes change with women in leadership, but more importantly, the meaning of leadership itself changes. The new tribal-woman president in Rashtrapati Bhavan, the new sarpanch in a Konkani panchayat, the new district judge in Bastar — each is rewriting the grammar one day at a time, often quietly enough that the rewriting is only visible in retrospect.

SOURCES

- Women's Reservation Bill: Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2023 Explained
- Droupadi Murmu: 15th President of India and First Tribal Woman in Rashtrapati Bhavan
- 73rd and 74th Amendments 1992: Panchayati Raj and Municipalities

Nari Shakti Vandan

PRI reservation

feminist policy

SEWA

gender budget

Mission Shakti

stand-up India

panchayat

Religious pluralism is not a tolerated condition but a constitutive promise

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

PLURALISM, SECULARISM AND CONSTITUTIONAL FAITH

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the Ashokan edicts at Girnar: ‘Whoever honours his own sect while disparaging another’s does great injury to his own.’ India’s preambular ‘secular’ (42nd Amendment 1976) was not new — it was the constitutional articulation of a 2,500-year-old practice. Thesis: religious pluralism in India is not a temporary tolerance to be revoked when convenient; it is the constitutive promise of the republic — the precondition without which India ceases to be India.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Constitutional architecture. Articles 25-28; the Bommai judgment (1994) reading secularism as basic structure; the Places of Worship Act 1991 freezing the religious character of 1947; the Sarva Dharma Sambhava framework. The Supreme Court’s 2024 directions in Gyanvapi and Kashi cases reiterate.

Argument 2 (~200w): Civilisational reality. The Sufi-Bhakti synthesis — Kabir, Mira, Nizamuddin Auliya, Guru Nanak. Akbar’s Din-i-Ilahi as imperfect but bold pluralism. Ahmedabad’s 14th-century jali patterns intertwining Hindu and Islamic motifs. The Sant tradition refused exclusion at the village fair.

Argument 3 (~200w): Contemporary pressure. Hate-crime tracking; the cow-vigilante murders 2014-19; love-jihad laws in eight states; UAPA arrests of journalists. Yet also: the Iftar at Tirumala for Muslim staff, the Sabarimala 2018 verdict, the Gauhati HC’s 2024 ruling on inter-religious marriage protection.

Counter-view (~150w): Pluralism without honest reckoning of historical grievances becomes evasion. Some communities feel their concerns suppressed in the name of secularism (the Shah Bano-Triple Talaq sequence). True pluralism is candid, not silent — it includes the right to disagree civilly.

Conclusion (~100w): Tagore in ‘Crisis in Civilization’ (1941): ‘Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high... into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.’ To dilute pluralism is to unmake India. To deepen it is to honour her oldest civilisational signature.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Ashokan Edict on respect for other sects (Girnar, Rock Edict XII)
- S R Bommai v Union of India (1994) — secularism as basic structure
- 42nd Amendment 1976 — ‘secular’ added to Preamble

- Places of Worship Act 1991
- Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi (1582)
- Sufi-Bhakti synthesis
- Sabarimala judgment (2018)
- Triple Talaq Act 2019
- Hindi: 'sarva dharma sambhava samvidhaan ka sansthapak vachan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Ashokan Rock Edict XII, Girnar
- S R Bommai v Union of India (1994)
- Places of Worship Act 1991
- Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi (1582)
- Kabir and Nizamuddin Auliya tradition
- Indian Young Lawyers Association v Kerala (Sabarimala, 28 September 2018)

MODEL ANSWER

At Girnar in modern Gujarat, an Ashokan rock inscription from the third century BCE warns: 'Whoever honours his own sect while disparaging another's, thinking he is exalting his own, does great injury to his own.' Rock Edict XII is the oldest constitutional text on Indian pluralism, predating most other political documents on the subject. When the 42nd Amendment in 1976 inserted 'secular' into the Preamble, it was not introducing a foreign concept; it was articulating, in modern legal vocabulary, a civilisational practice that had been twenty-three centuries in the making. Religious pluralism in India is not a temporary tolerance to be revoked when politically convenient, or a polite indulgence the majority extends to minorities at its discretion. It is the constitutive promise of the republic — the precondition without which India ceases to be India. The republic was not founded as a Hindu state or a secular one in the French sense; it was founded as the long Indian civilisational settlement, codified. The constitutional architecture is layered and intentional. Articles 25 to 28 guarantee freedom of conscience, propagation of religion, religious institution management, and freedom from compelled religious taxation or instruction in state-funded schools. The Supreme Court in *S R Bommai v Union of India* (11 March 1994) elevated secularism to a basic feature of the Constitution, beyond the amending power of Parliament under Article 368, and used the doctrine to scrutinise Article 356 proclamations against state governments. The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991 froze the religious character of all places of worship as they stood on 15 August 1947, with the sole

exception of the Ayodhya site — an attempt to draw a temporal line under historical grievance and prevent the courts from being drawn into adjudicating thirteenth-century claims. The doctrine of Sarva Dharma Sambhava — equal respect for all religions, not equidistance from them as in laïcité — was the founders' Indian variation on Western secularism, articulated by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan in his 1956 lectures and adopted as working principle.

The civilisational reality is older and richer than the Constitution. The Sufi-Bhakti synthesis — Kabir of fifteenth-century Kashi refusing to be claimed by either Hindu or Muslim, Mirabai walking from Mewar to Vrindavan, Nizamuddin Auliya of fourteenth-century Delhi welcoming all who came to his hospice, Guru Nanak founding a tradition that drew from both vocabularies — was a centuries-long democratic experiment in religious mixing. Akbar's Din-i-Ilahi of 1582 was imperfect and short-lived but bold; the Mughal court's patronage of Sanskrit translations of the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Atharva Veda was political theology of a generous kind. Ahmedabad's fourteenth-century jali patterns interweave Hindu lotus motifs and Islamic geometry within a single stone screen; Lucknow's Imambaras host Sikh pilgrims; Velankanni's Marian shrine draws Hindu and Christian devotees in equal numbers. The village fair, the Sufi shrine and the temple festival have shared crowds for as long as records exist; the boundary between communities at street level has historically been more porous than at sectarian-leadership level.

The contemporary pressure is real and must be honestly acknowledged. The cow-vigilante murders documented by major news organisations between 2014 and 2019, the 'love jihad' legislation enacted in eight states under different names beginning with Uttar Pradesh in 2020, the UAPA arrests of journalists from minority communities and prolonged pre-trial detentions, the Hindu-Muslim communal disturbances surrounding religious processions in multiple cities, and episodes around the Gyanvapi and Krishna Janmabhoomi mosques all suggest fault lines that did not run quite as deep a generation ago. Yet the same period has also produced significant counter-movements: the Iftar at Tirumala for Muslim staff in 2024, the Supreme Court's September 2018 verdict in *Indian Young Lawyers Association v State of Kerala* opening Sabarimala to women of all ages, the Gauhati High Court's 2024 ruling reaffirming the right to inter-religious marriage and ordering police protection for such couples, and the consistent participation of Hindu and Muslim families at each other's weddings and funerals in tens of thousands of mixed villages. The pendulum has not stopped swinging; the question for the present generation is whether the swing is widening or narrowing.

An honest counter-position must be heard. Pluralism without candid reckoning of historical grievances becomes evasion, and a secularism that asks one community alone to bear the burden of accommodation is unstable. Some communities feel their concerns have been suppressed under the rubric of secularism — the Shah Bano episode of 1985-86, when Parliament reversed a Supreme Court verdict on Muslim women's maintenance through the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, and the Triple Talaq Act of 2019 mark two ends of that long argument. The Sabarimala backlash, the controversy over Vande Mataram in schools, and the recurring debate over personal-law codification are all instances where pluralism has had to be re-negotiated rather than assumed. True pluralism is not silence but civility; it includes the right to disagree seriously, to litigate honestly and to legislate openly, with all sides willing to lose particular battles within the larger constitutional consensus.

A comparative reading is instructive. France's strict *laïcité* bans religious symbols in state schools; the United States' First Amendment establishes a high wall between church and state but allows vigorous religious expression in public life; Indonesia's Pancasila recognises six official religions while remaining constitutionally secular. India's *sarva dharma sambhava* is closer to the Indonesian model than to either French or American practice. The model has costs — perpetual negotiation, occasional flare-ups, the difficulty of treating religion as a fully private affair — but also strengths, including the capacity to honour difference without forcing assimilation.

Tagore wrote in *Crisis in Civilization* (1941), in the year before his death and as Europe burned, that he had not lost faith in humanity even as the Enlightenment's home countries betrayed their best traditions. His Gitanjali prayer — 'where the mind is without fear and the head is held high ... into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake' — was a prayer for a republic that did not yet exist. To dilute pluralism today is to unmake India; to deepen it is to honour her oldest civilisational signature. The Constitution did not invent religious pluralism in 1950. It received it from twenty-five centuries of practice, codified it for an industrial democracy, and entrusted it to the conscience of each citizen in each generation. The promise is constitutive, not contingent. To break it is not to amend the Constitution; it is to exit the civilisation that produced both Ashoka and Akbar, Kabir and Tagore, the Constituent Assembly and the temple-mosque town festivals.

SOURCES

- Places of Worship Act, 1991: Provisions, Exceptions, Secularism and UPSC Notes
- Right to Freedom of Religion in India (UPSC Polity)

→ Bhakti Movement in India: Origins, Saints, and Social Reform

secularism

Bommai judgment

Places of Worship Act

Sarva Dharma Sambhava

Sufi-Bhakti

religious pluralism

basic structure

Article 25

Q31

Mental wellness is the next frontier of public health

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

MENTAL HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND WELFARE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with WHO World Mental Health Report 2022: ‘1 in 8 people globally lives with a mental disorder.’ India’s National Mental Health Survey (NIMHANS 2015-16) found a 13.7% lifetime prevalence; the post-pandemic NMHS-2 (in progress) projects far higher. Mental illness costs the Indian economy ~USD 1.03 trillion in 2012-30 (Lancet Commission 2018). Thesis: while immunisation and surgery have been understood as public health, mental wellness is the next — and most under-funded — frontier.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The treatment gap. 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 in India (WHO Atlas 2024) vs the WHO recommended 3. Tele-MANAS (October 2022) has handled 18 lakh+ calls by 2025 — significant, but addresses only the tip. District Mental Health Programme reach remains uneven.

Argument 2 (~200w): The legal-policy stack. Mental Healthcare Act 2017 — decriminalised attempted suicide (Section 115), guaranteed right to mental healthcare, Advance Directives, the Mental Health Review Boards. National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022. RPwD Act 2016.

Argument 3 (~200w): The cultural shift. Deepika Padukone’s Live, Love, Laugh Foundation; Sneha Foundation’s helpline; school counsellor mandates by state boards; corporate wellness programmes. Stigma is melting; supply is not yet meeting demand.

Counter-view (~150w): Critics argue that medicalisation of unhappiness pathologises ordinary life. Robert Whitaker’s ‘Anatomy of an Epidemic’ (2010). Mental wellness must include social determinants — income, housing, dignity — not just pills.

Conclusion (~100w): Bhagavad Gita 6.5: ‘Uddhared atmanatmanam’ — let the self lift the self. A republic measured by GDP and forgetful of GMH (Gross Mental Health) builds skyscrapers on quicksand. The next public-health revolution must be of the mind.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- WHO World Mental Health Report 2022 (1 in 8 prevalence)
- NMHS 2015-16, NIMHANS
- Mental Healthcare Act 2017
- Tele-MANAS (since October 2022)
- National Suicide Prevention Strategy 2022
- Lancet Commission, mental health economic cost USD 1.03 trillion (2012-30)
- WHO Mental Health Atlas 2024
- Bhagavad Gita 6.5
- Hindi: 'maansik swasthya sarvajanic swasthya ka agla morcha hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Tele-MANAS launched 10 October 2022
- Mental Healthcare Act 2017 (decriminalising attempted suicide)
- Live, Love, Laugh Foundation (Deepika Padukone)
- Sneha Foundation (Chennai)
- Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health 2018
- WHO Mental Health Atlas 2024

MODEL ANSWER

The World Health Organization's World Mental Health Report of 2022 opens with a single statistic that has become the canonical opening for almost every subsequent paper in the field: one in eight people globally lives with a mental disorder, and the burden of depression and anxiety alone increased by 25 per cent during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. India's National Mental Health Survey, conducted by NIMHANS between 2015 and 2016 across 12 states with a sample of nearly forty thousand, recorded a lifetime prevalence of mental morbidity of 13.7 per cent and a current prevalence of 10.6 per cent; the post-pandemic NMHS-2, currently in field tabulation, is widely expected to record substantially higher numbers across every age band. The Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health of 2018 estimated the cumulative economic cost of mental illness to India at approximately one trillion dollars between 2012 and 2030 in foregone productivity and direct expenditure. Immunisation has been understood as public health for a century; surgical capacity has been understood as public health since the 1980s; mental wellness, the most under-funded of all medical fields, is the next — and most consequential — frontier the republic must cross.

The treatment gap is starkly visible and stubbornly persistent. The WHO Mental Health Atlas of 2024 records India at 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 population, against the WHO benchmark of 3 for low-and-middle-income countries and the OECD median of 18. Government expenditure on mental health is approximately 1 per cent of the total health budget, against the global recommendation of 5 per cent for countries at India's development stage. Tele-MANAS, the national tele-mental-health programme launched on 10 October 2022 with helplines in every state and Union Territory, has handled more than 18 lakh calls by 2025 — a meaningful intervention but one that addresses the tip of an iceberg whose base remains under-documented. The District Mental Health Programme, in operation since 1996 under the National Mental Health Programme of 1982, reaches all 766 districts on paper, but service availability varies widely. Whole districts of Bihar, Jharkhand and the North East have a single psychiatrist or none; community-mental-health-worker training has been uneven; and the integration with primary health centres remains aspirational in many states.

The legal and policy architecture, by contrast, is among the most progressive in the developing world. The Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 decriminalised attempted suicide under Section 115 (a reform many richer countries have not yet achieved); guaranteed every person a right to access affordable mental healthcare without discrimination; introduced Advance Directives by which a person can specify treatment preferences during periods of capacity; and constituted Mental Health Review Boards as quasi-judicial bodies for grievance redress and oversight of psychiatric institutions. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act of 2016 explicitly includes mental illness as one of 21 specified disabilities for the purpose of reservation, reasonable accommodation in workplaces, and accessibility. The National Suicide Prevention Strategy of 2022 set a target of reducing suicide mortality by 10 per cent by 2030 with a multi-sectoral approach including means restriction, surveillance and crisis intervention. The statutory canvas is large and well-drawn; the resourcing, the training pipeline and the public investment have not yet caught up.

The cultural shift is the most encouraging trend of the past decade. Deepika Padukone's Live, Love, Laugh Foundation, established in 2015, has reached millions through anti-stigma campaigns, school-counsellor training in three states, and media partnerships with major broadcasters; her own public disclosure of clinical depression in 2015 shifted prime-time conversation. The Sneha Foundation in Chennai runs one of India's longest-standing suicide-prevention helplines, founded in 1986. School-counsellor mandates from the Central Board of Secondary Education and several state boards have institutionalised pastoral care in adolescence; the National Education

Policy 2020 explicitly includes mental health and counselling under student support services. Corporate Employee Assistance Programmes have moved from afterthought to standard benefit in larger organisations between 2018 and 2024. A Bollywood actor talking about therapy on prime-time television does more to dissolve stigma in one evening than a decade of awareness campaigns; the supply of services is still trying to catch up to the demand that de-stigmatisation has surfaced.

The counter-argument deserves engagement and is not without intellectual force. Robert Whitaker in *Anatomy of an Epidemic* (2010) warned that the medicalisation of ordinary unhappiness pathologises the human condition and produces iatrogenic dependence on long-term psychotropic medication, with troubling longitudinal outcomes for the very disorders the drugs were meant to treat. Mental wellness is not only a clinical problem; it is, as the Lancet Commission framed it, a social-determinants problem. Income inequality, housing precarity, dignity at work, schooling quality, social inclusion of caste and gender minorities, access to green space, and the architecture of urban loneliness all shape mental health more powerfully than any prescription. A public-health strategy that distributes antidepressants while ignoring the wage-earning capacity of single mothers, or the safety of LGBTQ children at home, or the algorithmic anxiety load on adolescents, mistakes the symptom for the disease.

The Bhagavad Gita 6.5 reads *uddhared atmanatmanam* — let the self lift the self — and immediately adds *natmanam avasadayet*, let the self not be cast down by the self. The republic that builds skyscrapers and shopping malls on a citizenry quietly drowning in untreated anxiety is constructing on quicksand; the most expensive infrastructure ultimately rests on the cognitive and emotional capacity of the people who use it. The full prescription is integrated: triple the budgetary allocation over a decade; train 50,000 community mental-health workers under the District Mental Health Programme; scale Tele-MANAS to vernacular-language capacity in all 22 Eighth-Schedule languages; mandate mental-health-impact assessment for major welfare programmes and urban-design projects; treat suicide prevention as a Tier-I public-health emergency with state-level dashboards; integrate counselling into primary health centres in the manner Brazil's *Estratégia Saúde da Família* has demonstrated. The next great public-health revolution in India must be of the mind. The republic's growth is finally measured not by GDP alone but by Gross Mental Health, the unwritten denominator beneath every welfare statistic.

SOURCES

- Persons with Disabilities in India — RPwD Act 2016, UNCRPD and Accessible India
- UNEP Frontiers Report 2025: The Weight of Time, Disasters and Ageing
- WHO World Mental Health Report 2022

Tele-MANAS

Mental Healthcare Act

treatment gap

NIMHANS

DMHP

stigma

suicide prevention

RPwD

Q32

Persons with disability are not a special category but a constitutional default

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

DISABILITY, INCLUSION AND DIGNITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the Stephen Hawking image — wheelchair-bound, voice synthesised, mind unbounded. India has 2.21% of the population with disability per Census 2011 (likely undercount; WHO suggests 15%). The RPwD Act 2016 expanded recognised conditions from 7 to 21. Thesis: persons with disability are not a special category seeking concession from a ‘normal’ default — they are part of the constitutional default. The Constitution’s promise of dignity (Article 21) is empty if it stops at the kerb without a ramp.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Legal scaffolding. UNCRPD 2006 (India ratified 2007); RPwD Act 2016; the 2024 Supreme Court directions in *Rajive Raturi v Union of India* on accessibility audits; Accessible India Campaign (2015); reservation of 4% in government jobs (Section 34) and 5% in education (Section 32).

Argument 2 (~200w): The gap. NCAER 2023: 70% of PwD work-eligible are unemployed; only 24% of government buildings audited as fully accessible (2024 ASCI report); educational enrollment for children with disabilities drops sharply after primary (UDISE+ 2023-24).

Argument 3 (~200w): The frontier. Universal design as default (Tata Steel’s accessible plant in Kalinganagar); AI-assistive tools (BHASHINI sign-language pilots); Sugamya Bharat App; UDID card unified registration; PWD-friendly polling under ECI’s 2024 SOP.

Counter-view (~150w): Quotas without capability-building can be tokenism; many reserved posts go unfilled. The deeper task is universal design — buildings, software, transport designed for the widest range of users, so ‘accommodation’ becomes unnecessary.

Conclusion (~100w): Justice D Y Chandrachud in *Vikash Kumar* (2021): ‘Reasonable accommodation is the cornerstone of an inclusive society.’ Inclusion is not charity; it is the default the Constitution always intended. A republic measured by what it builds for those most easily excluded is a republic in working order.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 — 21 conditions
- UNCRPD 2006, India ratified 2007
- *Rajive Raturi v Union of India* (2024) accessibility directions
- Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), 2015
- *Vikash Kumar v UPSC* (2021) on reasonable accommodation
- Sugamya Bharat App
- UDID unified registration
- WHO disability prevalence 15%
- Hindi: 'divyangjan vishesh shreni nahin, samvidhaanik adhar hain'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016
- *Rajive Raturi v Union of India*, 8 November 2024
- Accessible India Campaign, December 2015
- Sugamya Bharat App
- Stephen Hawking
- *Vikash Kumar v UPSC* (2021)

MODEL ANSWER

Stephen Hawking sat in a wheelchair, spoke through a synthesised voice, and re-mapped the cosmology of the universe. The image is now iconic, but the iconography hides the basic point. Hawking’s mind was unbounded; the ramp at the lecture hall determined whether he could deliver the lecture. Disability, properly understood, is not a property of the body alone; it is the friction between the body and an environment built for some bodies but not others. India recorded 2.21 per cent of its population as persons with disability in Census 2011 — a figure widely regarded as an under-count (the World Health Organization’s global estimate is roughly 15 per cent). The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 expanded recognised conditions from 7 to 21. Persons with disability are not a special category seeking concession from a

‘normal’ default. They are part of the constitutional default. The Constitution’s promise of dignity (Article 21) is empty if it stops at the kerb without a ramp.

The legal scaffolding is substantial and improving. India ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 reorganised the previous regime, mandating non-discrimination, reasonable accommodation, and a guarantee of equality. Section 32 of the Act reserves 5 per cent of seats in higher education for persons with disabilities; Section 34 reserves 4 per cent in government jobs across specified categories. The Supreme Court’s 2024 judgment in *Rajive Raturi v Union of India*, delivered on 8 November 2024, ordered specific accessibility audits across central government buildings, transportation systems and websites, with timelines. The Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan), launched in December 2015, set targets for accessible buildings, transport and information. The Department for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and the National Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities provide the institutional architecture, even if their resources have lagged their mandates.

The implementation gap is wide. NCAER’s 2023 study found that 70 per cent of work-eligible persons with disabilities are unemployed. The ASCI 2024 audit found only 24 per cent of government buildings surveyed were fully accessible. UDISE+ 2023-24 showed enrollment of children with disabilities drops from over 90 per cent at entry to under 25 per cent by senior secondary. Reasons are structural: inadequate trained teachers, lack of accessible transport, no Braille materials in regional languages, no sign-language interpretation in classrooms. India needs at least 25,000 trained sign-language interpreters; fewer than 500 are certified.

The frontier of reform is universal design — the principle that buildings, software, transport and services should be designed from inception for the widest range of users, so that ‘accommodation’ becomes unnecessary. Tata Steel’s Kalinganagar plant was built with accessibility as default. BHASHINI is piloting sign-language modules; the Sugamya Bharat App lets citizens flag inaccessible spaces; the UDID card unifies registration with over 1.4 crore cards issued by 2025. The Election Commission’s 2024 SOP on accessibility ensured ramps, Braille EVMs and home-voting options for senior citizens and persons with disabilities — a measurable expansion of franchise. Delhi Metro and the Pune Metro have been designed accessible from inception.

The counter-view points to enforcement, not law. Quotas, critics argue, without capability-building become tokenism; many reserved posts go unfilled because

qualified candidates have not been adequately educated or trained. The 4 per cent reservation in government jobs has, in practice, often gone partly unmet. The deeper task, the argument continues, is supply-side investment — accessible schools that produce accessible graduates, accessible workplaces that retain them, accessible cities that include them — rather than demand-side quotas that try to retro-fit individuals into systems designed without them. The argument is partly correct. The answer is not to abandon quotas but to pair them with the universal-design investment that makes them meaningful. The Karnataka State Commissionerate for Persons with Disabilities has piloted accessible-classroom audits in 1,000 schools; the model is replicable nationally if budgeted.

The cultural shift is equally important. India still operates with a charity model of disability — donations to organisations, telethons for individuals, photo opportunities at award ceremonies. The rights model — that persons with disabilities are equal claimants of public goods — is younger and less rooted. The shift requires media that depict persons with disabilities as protagonists rather than recipients, schools that integrate rather than segregate, employers that hire based on skill rather than condition, and a public discourse that treats accessibility as a feature, not a favour. The 2024 Paris Paralympics saw India's largest-ever Paralympic contingent and second-highest medal tally — a sporting story that quietly normalised disability as competitive presence. The Khelo India Paralympic programme, since 2018, has built a competitive pipeline that did not previously exist.

Technology is opening genuinely new possibilities. Screen readers for the visually impaired have become more accurate in Indian languages through BHASHINI integration. Wheelchair innovations from IIT Madras's R2D2 lab and start-ups like Neomotion have produced affordable indigenous wheelchairs. AI-assisted captioning is becoming default on major platforms. The challenge is that these technologies remain affordable and that their development includes persons with disabilities as co-designers. Employment must shift from token reservation to genuine inclusion: companies including Lemon Tree Hotels (with 20 per cent of its workforce being persons with disabilities), Wipro and Mphasis have built structured inclusion programmes with retention rates exceeding the overall workforce average. The business case — lower attrition, higher engagement, broader market understanding — is documented. The intersectional dimension matters: a 2024 IIM Ahmedabad study found that women with disabilities have employment rates a third lower than men with disabilities, and Dalit women with disabilities a third lower still.

Justice D Y Chandrachud, writing for the Supreme Court in *Vikash Kumar v Union Public Service Commission* (11 February 2021), held that ‘reasonable accommodation is the cornerstone of an inclusive society’. The phrase ‘reasonable accommodation’ did the lifting. It is neither minimum charity nor maximum disruption; it is the architectural and procedural adjustments that allow a person with disability to participate as an equal. The scribe in the examination hall, the audio descriptor in the lecture, the ramp at the office, the live captioning in the meeting, the flexible work-from-home option for those whose conditions require it — each is reasonable accommodation in operation.

The republic is not measured by what it builds for those most easily included; it is measured by what it builds for those most easily excluded. **Inclusion is not charity; it is the default the Constitution always intended.** A society that designs its built environment, its software stack, its transport systems and its work cultures so that no one’s body is a barrier to their citizenship is a society in working order. Persons with disability are not a ‘special’ category. They are the constitutional default the republic must finally meet.

SOURCES

- Persons with Disabilities in India — RPwD Act 2016, UNCRPD and Accessible India
- Personal Liberty under Article 21 — Maneka Gandhi to Puttaswamy
- Fundamental Rights and Duties of Indian Constitution — Articles 12-35 + Article 51A

RPwD Act

UNCRPD

Accessible India

universal design

reasonable accommodation

Sugamya Bharat

Rajive Raturi

UDID

Q33

The tribal commons is a treaty the modern state still owes

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

TRIBAL RIGHTS, FRA AND FOREST COMMONS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Verrier Elwin’s lifelong argument that tribal India is not pre-modern India but parallel India — a civilisation with different relationships to land, time and self. India has 705 Scheduled Tribes, 75 PVTGs and 8.6% of population (Census 2011). Thesis: the relationship between the modern Indian state and its tribal commons is a treaty long promised, partially signed, often breached. To honour it is constitutional duty, not generosity.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The legal architecture. Fifth and Sixth Schedules; PESA Act 1996 (Section 4(d) gram sabha custom); Forest Rights Act 2006; the Niyamgiri verdict (Orissa Mining v Ministry of Environment & Forests, 2013) — the Supreme Court let the Dongria Kondh gram sabhas vote ‘no’ to bauxite mining.

Argument 2 (~200w): Persistent breaches. Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAMPA) without gram-sabha consent; 32% of FRA Individual Forest Rights claims rejected (MoTA 2024); the 2022 Forest Conservation Amendment debates; the Hasdeo Aranya struggle (Chhattisgarh, 2023-25). Displacement: 25 million tribals displaced since 1947 (Walter Fernandes).

Argument 3 (~200w): Pathways. PM-JANMAN (2023) for PVTGs; Adi Karmyogi Programme (2025) for tribal change leaders; Janjatiya Gaurav Divas (15 November) institutionalised in 2021; ITDA strengthening; bio-cultural community protocols (Khasi Hills REDD+).

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue absolute tribal autonomy can isolate communities from modern healthcare, education and markets. True — but the binary of autonomy vs integration is false. The Khasi Hills REDD+ shows community choice can be both traditional and globally rewarded.

Conclusion (~100w): Birsa Munda’s vision of ‘Ulgulan’ (great tumult) was not separatism — it was demand for honest contract. The constitutional treaty with tribal India must be re-read in 2026 with the seriousness it always deserved.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Forest Rights Act 2006
- PESA Act 1996
- Niyamgiri verdict (2013)
- Hasdeo Aranya struggle (2023-25)
- PM-JANMAN (November 2023)
- Adi Karmyogi Programme 2025
- Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, 15 November
- Walter Fernandes — 25 million displaced
- Hindi: 'adivasi commons rashtra ka adhura vachan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Forest Rights Act 2006
- Orissa Mining v MoEF (Niyamgiri, 18 April 2013)

- PM-JANMAN, 15 November 2023
- Adi Karmyogi Programme 2025
- Khasi Hills REDD+ project
- Hasdeo Aranya protests, 2023-25

MODEL ANSWER

Verrier Elwin spent a lifetime arguing a single point: tribal India is not pre-modern India. It is parallel India — a civilisation with different relationships to land, to time, to the self. Elwin came to Mandla in 1932 as a Christian missionary; he stayed, marrying Gond and Pardhan partners, until his death in 1964 in Shillong. Modern India has 705 Scheduled Tribes, 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, and 8.6 per cent of its population identified as tribal in Census 2011. The relationship between the modern Indian state and the tribal commons — the forests, sacred groves, customary lands and shared resources of these communities — is a treaty long promised, partially signed, and often breached. To honour it is constitutional duty, not generosity.

The legal architecture is layered and ambitious. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution provides for the administration of Scheduled Areas in nine states; the Sixth Schedule provides autonomous district councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 (PESA), in its critical Section 4(d), requires gram sabha consent for land alienation and development decisions in Fifth Schedule areas — a constitutional vesting of veto in the village assembly. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, popularly called the Forest Rights Act, recognised individual and community forest rights that had been systematically denied since colonial-era forest reservation. The Supreme Court's 2013 judgment in *Orissa Mining Corporation v Ministry of Environment & Forests* — the Niyamgiri case — gave the Dongria Kondh of Odisha's hills the right, through their gram sabhas, to vote on whether bauxite mining could proceed. All twelve gram sabhas voted no. The mine was stopped. The judgment was not merely a verdict in a single case; it was a constitutional doctrine that gram sabhas hold substantive consent powers, not merely consultative roles.

The breaches are equally documented. The Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority handles tens of thousands of crores from forest diversion payments without statutory requirement of gram-sabha consent. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs' data for 2024 records that 32 per cent of Individual Forest Rights claims under the FRA have been rejected, with rejection rates exceeding 50 per

cent in states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act 2023, despite legal challenges, narrowed the scope of forest land protection. The Hasdeo Aranya struggle in Chhattisgarh between 2023 and 2025 saw tribal communities resist coal-block clearances in dense forest tracts that they had inhabited for generations. The Sociologist Walter Fernandes has estimated that 25 million tribals have been displaced since 1947 by dams, mines, industrial projects and conservation enclosures — a population larger than several European countries, scattered into urban poverty and shrinking rural commons. Each displacement is a small private rupture for a family that had a place in the world; cumulatively, they are a structural failure of the constitutional promise.

The pathways forward are visible but require sustained will. The PM-JANMAN scheme, launched on 15 November 2023 with an outlay of 24,104 crore rupees, targets nine critical interventions for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups — housing, road connectivity, piped water, mobile medical units, hostels for tribal students. The Adi Karmiyogi Programme, launched in 2025, builds a three-tier cadre of tribal change leaders trained in Constitution, schemes, and community mobilisation. Janjatiya Gaurav Divas, institutionalised in 2021 on 15 November to commemorate Birsa Munda's birth anniversary, has shifted national memory toward tribal contributions to the freedom struggle. Integrated Tribal Development Agencies in many states are being strengthened. The Eklavya Model Residential Schools, expanded under the Modi government's 2018-onward programme, target high-quality education for tribal children in their own regions. Bio-cultural community protocols — formal documents in which tribal communities articulate their own governance norms — are being used in REDD-plus projects. The Khasi Hills REDD-plus project in Meghalaya, which earned its first verified emission reductions in 2023, demonstrates how traditional community management can interlock with global carbon markets without surrendering local sovereignty.

A serious counter-view deserves engagement. Some argue absolute tribal autonomy isolates communities from modern healthcare, education, markets and infrastructure that they themselves need. The PVTGs identified for PM-JANMAN have some of the worst maternal mortality, child malnutrition and adult literacy outcomes in the country. Cellular reception, school buildings, primary health centres, all-weather roads — these are not impositions; they are entitlements. The binary of 'pristine autonomy' versus 'forced integration' is false and dangerous. The Khasi Hills REDD-plus example, the Kerala tribal-administration model under Athulyam, the Attappady Comprehensive Tribal Development Project, and the Niyamgiri precedent all

demonstrate that community choice — exercised by the people themselves through their gram sabhas — can be both traditional and globally connected. The discipline is to ensure choice is real, not coerced.

The deeper issue is the political economy of the commons. The Indian state's developmental promise to tribal areas has often been conditional on the extraction of the resources those areas hold: bauxite in Niyamgiri, iron in Bastar, coal in Hasdeo, uranium in Jadugoda, copper in Malanjkhand, manganese in Balaghat. The economic logic of national growth has repeatedly collided with the constitutional logic of local consent. PESA's Section 4(d), if honestly implemented, would re-balance this collision. The FRA's community forest rights, when actually granted, would transfer governance to those who have historically borne the cost. The pending question is whether the state, faced with the rising commodity demands of the energy transition (especially critical minerals located in tribal regions), will follow its own statutes or circumvent them. The 2025 Critical Minerals Mission's emphasis on tribal-region exploration makes this question sharper than at any point since liberalisation.

Education, language and health are quieter dimensions of the same struggle. Hundreds of tribal languages lack standardised scripts and school textbooks; the 2009 Right to Education Act's mother-tongue principle is observed unevenly. The 2024 National Sickle Cell Anaemia Elimination Mission, targeting elimination by 2047 with 4.5 crore people to be screened, addresses one acute tribal-health priority among many identified by Dr Abhay Bang's Expert Committee on Tribal Health (2018). The pattern across health, education and economic indicators is consistent: when interventions are designed with tribal participation, outcomes improve; when designed for tribal communities without their participation, they fail or are resisted.

Birsa Munda's *Ulgulan* — the 'great tumult' of 1899-1900 against landlords, missionaries and colonial dispossession — was not separatism. It was the demand for an honest contract: that those who had lived on a land for generations be recognised as belonging to it. The contract Birsa demanded was constitutional in spirit before there was a Constitution. The republic that emerged in 1950 wrote that recognition into the Fifth Schedule, the Sixth Schedule, PESA, the FRA, and a steady jurisprudence. **The constitutional treaty with tribal India must be re-read in 2026 with the seriousness it always deserved.** Honoured, it strengthens both tribal communities and the republic that contains them. Breached, it leaves both poorer than the document promised.

SOURCES

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- PVTGs of India: 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, PM-JANMAN, and the Dhebar Commission Story
- Adi Karmyogi Programme (Abhiyan): Tribal Change Leaders, Three-Tier Cadre

FRA 2006

PESA

PM-JANMAN

Niyamgiri

Adi Karmyogi

Hasdeo Aranya

REDD+

Sixth Schedule

Q34

Manual scavenging is the unfinished sentence of the Republic

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

MANUAL SCAVENGING, SANITATION AND DIGNITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Bezwada Wilson, 2016 Magsaysay laureate and Safai Karmachari Andolan founder: ‘We are killing each other one death at a time.’ India banned manual scavenging in 1993 (and again in 2013), yet 339 sewer/septic-tank deaths occurred between 2019 and 2023 (Ministry of Social Justice). Thesis: as long as caste-coded humans descend into sewers without protective equipment, the Constitution’s Article 17 (untouchability) remains an unfinished sentence — a clause whose period the republic has not yet had the courage to type.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The statute trail. Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993; Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 (PEMSR); 2024 Supreme Court directions in *Dr Balram Singh v Union of India* ordering total elimination by 2028.

Argument 2 (~200w): The gap. NAMASTE scheme (National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem, 2023); only 38,000 of 58,000 surveyed identified as MSWs (Ministry data 2024); rehabilitation grants of ₹40,000 inadequate; 92% of deceased sewer workers belonged to SC, particularly Valmiki, Madiga and Hela communities.

Argument 3 (~200w): Technology and dignity. Robotic Bandicoot deployment in Kerala (2018) and now 17 states; safety devices (DRDO Mobile septic-tank robot 2024); the Swachh Bharat Mission’s 11.6 crore toilets but lack of safe-disposal infrastructure; sewerage-network gap (only 33% of urban sewage treated, CPCB 2024).

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue the issue is not law but enforcement and economics — local contractors employ casual labour, not formal sanitation workers. True — but the 2024 SC directions explicitly hold the principal employer (often municipal) liable.

Conclusion (~100w): Ambedkar in the Annihilation of Caste: ‘Caste has killed public spirit.’ Manual scavenging is the literal weighing of public spirit against caste tradition. Until no Indian descends into a sewer to clean another’s waste with bare hands, the Republic’s sentence is open.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- PEMSR Act 2013
- Dr Balram Singh v Union of India (2024 SC)
- NAMASTE Scheme 2023
- Bezwada Wilson, Magsaysay 2016
- 339 sewer deaths 2019-23 (MoSJE)
- Bandicoot robot, Kerala
- CPCB data — 33% urban sewage treated
- Article 17 (untouchability)
- Hindi: 'haath se mailaa dhona ganarajya ka adhura vakya hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Bezwada Wilson, Safai Karmachari Andolan founder
- Dr Balram Singh v Union of India (2024)
- NAMASTE Scheme (replacing SRMS), 2023
- Bandicoot robotic scavenger, Kerala, 2018
- PEMSR Act 2013
- Swachh Bharat Mission, October 2014

MODEL ANSWER

Bezwada Wilson, founder of Safai Karmachari Andolan and 2016 Magsaysay laureate, has spent four decades counting deaths in sewers. ‘We are killing each other,’ he has said, ‘one death at a time.’ India banned manual scavenging by statute in 1993 and again, more comprehensively, in 2013. Between 2019 and 2023, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment recorded 339 deaths from sewer and septic-tank cleaning operations. Each death is a Dalit body, almost always from Valmiki, Madiga, Hela or related communities, descending without protective equipment into spaces no human being should enter. As long as caste-coded humans descend into sewers to clean the waste of caste-uncoded humans, the Constitution’s **Article 17**, which declares untouchability abolished and its practice an offence, remains an unfinished sentence — a clause whose period the republic has not yet had the courage to type.

The statute trail is long and the failure cumulative. The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 prohibited the construction of dry latrines and the employment of persons to manually clean human excreta. Implementation was negligible. The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 (PEMSR) widened the definition to include hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic tanks, mandated rehabilitation through cash assistance, scholarships, skills training and alternative employment, and made principal employers liable for deaths. In 2024, the Supreme Court in *Dr Balram Singh v Union of India*, delivered on 26 January 2024 with subsequent compliance hearings, directed the central government to achieve total elimination of manual scavenging by 2028, mandated mechanisation, increased compensation for fatal accidents to 30 lakh rupees, and ordered state-wise affidavits of compliance.

The implementation gap is structural. The NAMASTE scheme — National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem — launched in 2023 replacing the earlier Self-Employment Scheme for Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers, allocated 349.7 crore rupees for FY 2023-26. As of mid-2024, only about 38,000 of an estimated 58,000 surveyed sanitation workers had been identified and registered. The rehabilitation cash assistance of 40,000 rupees, even if disbursed promptly, is inadequate for a family to transition out of a hereditary occupation. Of the recorded sewer deaths, 92 per cent of the deceased belonged to Scheduled Caste communities — confirmation that the occupation is not random labour but caste-coded labour. The Safai Karmachari Andolan's parallel survey identifies thousands more excluded from formal counts because of fear or administrative invisibility.

Technology has begun to offer alternatives that respect dignity. The Bandicoot robotic scavenger, developed by Genrobotics in Kerala and deployed first by the Kerala Water Authority in 2018, can clean manholes without human entry. Bandicoot units now operate in 17 states. The Defence Research and Development Organisation's mobile septic-tank robot, demonstrated in 2024, extends the technology. The Indian Sanitation Coalition and the Centre for Policy Research have argued that mechanisation budgets must be coupled with municipal procurement reform — many city corporations still award sanitation contracts to small contractors who employ casual Dalit labour rather than to municipal sanitation units with safety protocols. The Swachh Bharat Mission's success in constructing 11.6 crore household toilets between 2014 and 2024 was a public-health triumph; the equivalent investment in safe sewage treatment infrastructure has lagged. The Central Pollution Control Board's 2024 data

records that only 33 per cent of urban sewage is treated. The remaining 67 per cent flows into rivers, drains and septic tanks that someone, eventually, must clean.

The counter-view deserves engagement. Critics argue the issue is not law but enforcement and economics — most fatal incidents involve small private contractors employing casual labour, not formal municipal sanitation workers. Banning manual scavenging on paper, the argument runs, does not eliminate the small-contractor economy that produces the practice. The 2024 Supreme Court directions in *Balram Singh* explicitly addressed this objection by holding the principal employer — typically the municipal corporation or public-sector undertaking that engaged the contractor — liable for fatalities. The Court further directed that all sewer and septic-tank cleaning be done exclusively through mechanised means with protective equipment and only as an emergency exception. Enforcement remains the gap, but the legal architecture is now unambiguous. Municipal corporations cannot anymore claim that they did not know who was cleaning their sewers; ignorance is no longer a legal defence.

The deeper challenge is cultural. Manual scavenging is sustained by a caste-economy in which certain communities are presumed available for tasks that the broader society refuses. The persistence of the occupation despite legal prohibition measures how deeply the caste-presumption has survived constitutional abolition. The full eradication of the caste-occupation link requires not only enforcement but cultural shift: the recognition that sanitation work, properly mechanised, equipped and compensated, is dignified work that should be performed by trained professionals on regular pay, drawn from the entire population rather than from one stigmatised section of it.

The economics of mechanisation are favourable when accounted honestly. A Bandicoot unit costs approximately 38 lakh rupees and saves multiple human lives across its operational life; the compensation alone for a single sewer death is 30 lakh rupees, plus the ethical cost no number captures. The argument that mechanisation is unaffordable is, on inspection, the argument that human life is cheaper than equipment — a position no public official can defend in court or in the press.

The Swachh Bharat Mission's symbolic image — Prime Minister Narendra Modi sweeping a street with a broom in October 2014 — momentarily disrupted the caste association of sanitation labour. But symbolic disruption is fragile; structural disruption requires mechanisation, formal employment, training infrastructure, social-security cover, occupational health monitoring and dignified compensation.

The 2024 NITI Aayog Working Group on Urban Sanitation has identified specific budget reallocations — within existing schemes — that could complete mechanisation across all Tier-1 and Tier-2 cities within five years. The bottleneck is municipal procurement reform and state-level political will, not central financing. The voices of sanitation workers themselves, articulated through Safai Karmachari Andolan and Rashtriya Garima Abhiyan, must shape the reform; the 2024 Sanitation Workers' National Convention's charter for full mechanisation, formal municipal employment and scholarship guarantees for workers' children is minimal, not extreme.

B R Ambedkar, in *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), wrote that 'caste has killed public spirit.' Manual scavenging is the literal weighing of public spirit against caste tradition — and tradition has, so far, won the daily contest in too many cities. The Constitution's Article 17 declared untouchability abolished in 1950. Seventy-five years later, that abolition remains a partial achievement — true in courts, contested in cities. **Until no Indian descends into a sewer to clean another's waste with bare hands, the Republic's sentence is open.** Closing it is not the work of one ministry, one judgment or one budget cycle. It is the work of the republic taking its own founding promise seriously, in the most undignified corner where dignity is most needed.

SOURCES

- Ambedkar's Philosophy: Annihilation of Caste, Social Democracy and Navayana Buddhism
- Fundamental Rights and Duties of Indian Constitution — Articles 12-35 + Article 51A
- Persons with Disabilities in India — RPwD Act 2016, UNCRPD and Accessible India

manual scavenging

PEMSR Act

NAMASTE

Bandicoot

Balram Singh judgment

untouchability

Bezwada Wilson

Article 17

ESSAY

Governance

13 practice questions

Q35

A democracy is measured by the patience of its institutions

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

HARD

DEMOCRACY, INSTITUTIONS AND TIME

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Begin with Justice H.R. Khanna's lone dissent in ADM Jabalpur (1976) — a single act of judicial patience that took 41 years to be vindicated (Puttaswamy, 2017). Democracy is slow; tyranny is efficient. Thesis: a democracy is not weighed by how quickly it can act, but by how patiently its institutions can listen, deliberate, and dissent without collapsing.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Legislative patience. Parliamentary committees, the second reading, opposition time, anti-defection cooling-off. India's Constituent Assembly took 2 years 11 months 18 days to draft 395 articles — each clause debated. Today, 22 bills passed in less than 10 minutes in the 17th Lok Sabha is the inverse of that founding patience.

Argument 2 (~200w): Judicial patience. The Kesavananda Bharati bench sat for 68 days. The Ayodhya verdict gestated for nearly seven decades. PILs that birthed forest protection (T.N. Godavarman, ongoing since 1995), midday meals (PUCL, 2001), Mullaperiyar (ongoing). Slowness here is not delay; it is the discipline of finality.

Argument 3 (~200w): Federal patience. GST Council — 53 meetings since 2017, every rate decided by consensus. Inter-State Council, Zonal Councils, Finance Commission's 5-year cycle. NITI Aayog's competitive federalism. Even contentious issues — Article 370, citizenship laws — must pass through layered institutional review.

Counter-view (~150w): Patience can become paralysis. 4.5 crore pending court cases (NJDG 2024). Bills passed without scrutiny (only 16% sent to Standing Committees in the 17th LS vs 71% in the 15th). India faces 1.85 lakh undertrials (NCRB 2022). Patience without urgency is injustice in slow motion.

Conclusion (~100w): Dr Ambedkar warned that constitutional methods must replace 'grammar of anarchy'. The patience he meant is not laziness but discipline — the

willingness to lose a vote and still respect the count. A republic, like a banyan, grows slowly but holds longest.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- ADM Jabalpur (1976) — Justice H.R. Khanna's dissent
- Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017)
- Constituent Assembly duration (1946-49)
- Kesavananda Bharati 13-judge bench, 68 days
- GST Council 53 meetings, consensus mode
- Standing Committee scrutiny decline (71% to 16%)
- NJDG 2024 — 4.5 crore pending cases
- Ambedkar's 'grammar of anarchy' warning
- Hindi: 'loktantra ki gati nahin uska dheeraaj'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- ADM Jabalpur v Shivkant Shukla (1976)
- Justice H.R. Khanna's dissent and supersession
- T.N. Godavarman PIL (ongoing since 1995)
- Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala (1973)
- GST Council operating since July 2017
- Ayodhya Verdict, M Siddiq v Mahant Suresh Das (2019)
- Ambedkar's 25 November 1949 closing speech

MODEL ANSWER

On 28 April 1976, in a courtroom in New Delhi, a four-judge majority of the Supreme Court ruled that during an Emergency, the right to life and liberty under Article 21 itself stood suspended. The case was *ADM Jabalpur v Shivkant Shukla*. The judgment, the legal scholar H. M. Seervai later called, was the darkest hour of the Indian judiciary. One judge dissented. Justice H. R. Khanna, the senior-most after the Chief Justice, wrote that the rule of law did not 'permit a State to enable arbitrary deprivation of life or personal liberty'. He paid for the dissent with the chief justiceship; A. N. Ray and then M. H. Beg were appointed above him. Forty-one years later, on 24 August 2017, in *K. S. Puttaswamy v Union of India*, a nine-judge bench overruled *ADM Jabalpur* and made Khanna's dissent the law of the land. **A democracy is not weighed by how quickly it can act, but by how patiently its institutions can listen, deliberate, and dissent without collapsing.**

Patience is not the same as slowness. Slowness is what we experience in pending court cases and unmoved files. Patience, in a constitutional sense, is the practised discipline of taking the time to do something properly. The Constituent Assembly took 2 years 11 months 18 days, between 9 December 1946 and 24 January 1950, to draft, debate, and adopt 395 Articles. Each Article was discussed; the longest debate was on what would become Article 32, the right to constitutional remedies, which Ambedkar called ‘the heart and soul of the Constitution’. By contrast, in the 17th Lok Sabha which sat from June 2019 to June 2024, 22 bills were passed in less than ten minutes apiece; the average bill spent 17 minutes on the floor. Of 222 bills introduced, only 16 per cent were referred to a Standing Committee, against 71 per cent in the 15th Lok Sabha. Speed is not democracy; speed is what tyranny envies.

Judicial patience is its rarest form. The Kesavananda Bharati bench of 13 judges, the largest in the Supreme Court’s history, sat for 68 working days between 31 October 1972 and 23 March 1973, before pronouncing the basic structure doctrine. The Ayodhya land-title dispute gestated for nearly seven decades, from the placing of idols in December 1949 to the unanimous five-judge verdict of 9 November 2019, with no judge appending a separate opinion. T. N. Godavarman’s writ petition on forest protection, filed in 1995, is the longest continuing PIL in the world, with the Supreme Court still issuing orders through its Empowered Committee. The Right to Food case (*PUCL v Union of India*, 2001) has generated, over two decades, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme that today reaches 11.8 crore children. Slowness here is not delay; it is the discipline of finality.

Federal patience is the third dimension. The GST Council, set up under Article 279A in September 2016, has held 53 meetings since its first sitting on 22 September 2017; until 2023, every rate change was decided by consensus, not by vote. The 16th Finance Commission, constituted in December 2023 under Article 280, will deliver recommendations only by October 2025 after state-by-state consultations. The Inter-State Council, the Zonal Councils, and the NITI Aayog Governing Council each take time because consensus is the only durable currency in a federation as varied as India’s. **Shortcuts in federalism are how federations break.**

Legislative patience completes the picture. Parliamentary committees, the second reading, the right to be heard, the question hour, the anti-defection cooling-off period are not bureaucratic delays. They are the deliberative architecture of self-government. The Rajya Sabha, conceived as a ‘house of elders’ by Ambedkar precisely to slow down hot-headed legislation, has performed that function in select moments; its 1989 rejection of a Defamation Bill and the 2024 detailed scrutiny of the One Nation One

Election report show what a patient upper house can do. The Speaker's role under Rule 308 of the Rules of Procedure includes the discretion to send bills to Standing Committees, a discretion exercised less and less in recent years.

Yet patience has a dark twin, and an honest essay must say so. Patience can lapse into paralysis. India's National Judicial Data Grid in March 2024 recorded 4.5 crore pending cases, of which 5.96 lakh have crossed twenty years. The country holds 1.85 lakh undertrials, of whom many will eventually be acquitted. Father Stan Swamy died in custody on 5 July 2021 awaiting bail at the age of 84. Bilkis Bano waited 16 years for the conviction of her assailants. The Standing Committee scrutiny rate falling from 71 to 16 per cent in two decades is not patience but its caricature, a Parliament that has stopped deliberating in pretending to. Patience without urgency is injustice in slow motion.

The distinction matters because the cure for delay is not haste; it is throughput. India has 21 judges per million population; the Law Commission's recommendation, in its 120th report of 1987, was 50. Vacancies in the High Courts have hovered at 30 per cent. The National Judicial Infrastructure Authority proposal by Chief Justice N. V. Ramana in 2021 is still pending Cabinet approval. The Gram Nyayalayas Act of 2008 envisaged 5,000 village courts; only 268 have been operationalised. The e-Courts Mission Mode Project Phase III, sanctioned at Rs 7,210 crore in September 2023, must be implemented. Lok Adalats disposed of 3.5 crore cases in 2023 alone, demonstrating that throughput is possible.

The counter-argument lives here. Some say that patience is a luxury of stable democracies; emerging republics need decisive leaders to break logjams. But the historical record is unkind to that view. Indira Gandhi's Emergency, decisive and quick, set back constitutional democracy by 21 months and required four decades to repair. The Sri Lankan one-party experiment of 1972, the Brazilian generals from 1964 to 1985, the Hungarian backsliding under Viktor Orbán since 2010 each began as impatience with deliberation. Strong leaders are eventually outlived by strong institutions, and strong institutions are slow on purpose.

Ambedkar's closing speech to the Constituent Assembly, on 25 November 1949, warned the country in three sentences against what he called 'the grammar of anarchy', the substitution of constitutional methods by unconstitutional ones. The patience he meant was not laziness; it was the willingness to lose a vote today and still respect the count. **A republic, like a banyan, grows slowly but holds longest.** The Indian democracy at seventy-six is no longer the experiment of 1950; it is the longest

continuous franchise of human history, with 968 million voters in 2024 and the operational ability to count their preferences across 5.5 million electronic voting machines. Its next test is not whether it can act quickly; it is whether, when the temptation comes, it can be patient enough to keep its own promises.

SOURCES

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constitutional morality

judicial review

basic structure

cooperative federalism

deliberative democracy

anti-defection

standing committee

grammar of anarchy

stare decisis

Q36

Justice delayed is democracy denied

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

JUDICIARY, ACCESS TO JUSTICE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): William Gladstone observed that ‘justice delayed is justice denied’ — in a constitutional democracy, the equation completes itself: justice denied is democracy denied. India’s National Judicial Data Grid (March 2024) records 4.5 crore pending cases, 1.85 lakh undertrials, average disposal time of 13 years in some high courts. Thesis: when the courts run slow, the Constitution itself develops arthritis.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The cost. Bilkis Bano’s 16-year journey to conviction. Maya Kodnani’s case spanning a decade. Father Stan Swamy died awaiting bail. Acquittals after 25 years in TADA cases. Each year of delay is a year of borrowed liberty.

Argument 2 (~200w): The causes. India has 21 judges per million (Law Commission recommends 50). 5,580 court-hall shortage. Frequent adjournments (CPC O.17). 5.96 lakh of 4.5 crore are over 20 years old (NJDG). Police investigation delays under BNSS 2023.

Argument 3 (~200w): The architecture. Lok Adalats disposed 3.5 crore cases in 2023. NALSA’s free legal aid for 80% of population (Section 12, LSA Act 1987). e-Courts Mission Mode III, 2023. Gram Nyayalayas Act 2008, Fast-Track Special Courts for POCSO. National Judicial Infrastructure Authority proposal.

Counter-view (~150w): Critics argue speed without due process produces wrongful convictions (40% of Indian prisoners are undertrials per NCRB 2022). The cure is not haste

but throughput — more judges, better case management, ADR. Plea bargaining under BNSS 2023 widens space for resolution without trial.

Conclusion (~100w): Ambedkar reminded the Constituent Assembly that ‘however good a constitution, if those who implement it are bad, it will turn out bad.’ Speed is the unspoken seventh fundamental right. A republic which keeps its citizens waiting in court rooms is, in a quiet but profound way, breaking its own promise.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- NJDG March 2024 — 4.5 crore pending cases
- 21 judges per million in India
- Lok Adalats disposing 3.5 crore cases in 2023
- Gram Nyayalayas Act 2008
- Bilkis Bano case timeline
- Father Stan Swamy custody death, 2021
- Plea bargaining under BNSS 2023
- NJIC (National Judicial Infrastructure Corporation) proposal
- Hindi: 'nyaay mein der nyaay se inkaar hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Bilkis Bano case (16-year trial)
- Father Stan Swamy custody death, July 2021
- Akhil Gogoi acquittal after 1.5 years in UAPA detention
- Lok Adalats disposal record 2023
- Gram Nyayalayas Act 2008
- e-Courts Mission Mode Project III, launched 2023

MODEL ANSWER

In 1856, in a House of Commons speech on a complaint about the Court of Chancery, William Gladstone observed that ‘justice delayed is justice denied’. The aphorism has aged into a constitutional axiom, but in a parliamentary democracy it requires one more step. **If justice is denied, democracy itself is denied, because a republic that cannot deliver fair outcomes within a meaningful timeframe stops being legible to its citizens.** India’s National Judicial Data Grid in March 2024 recorded 4.5 crore pending cases across all courts: 5.96 lakh of these had crossed 20 years; the average disposal time in some high courts exceeded 13 years; 1.85 lakh undertrials, by

the NCRB of 2022, were languishing in jail awaiting determination of guilt. When the courts run slow, the Constitution develops arthritis.

The human cost is the unavoidable starting point. Bilkis Bano survived gang-rape during the 2002 Gujarat riots and lost seven family members, including her three-year-old daughter, on 3 March 2002. She received conviction of her assailants in January 2008 and the Supreme Court's confirmation of life imprisonment in April 2017, sixteen years after the crime. Father Stan Swamy, an octogenarian Jesuit accused under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act in the Bhima Koregaon case, died in judicial custody at Holy Family Hospital, Bandra, on 5 July 2021 without being brought to trial. Akhil Gogoi, the Assam activist, spent eighteen months in jail under UAPA before his acquittal in 2021. Maya Kodnani, a former Gujarat minister, was finally cleared by the High Court in April 2018 in a case spanning nearly two decades. Each year of delay is a year of borrowed liberty, paid back by ordinary people in the currency of life itself.

The causes of delay are structural, not mysterious. India has 21 judges per million population; the Law Commission's 120th Report of 1987 recommended 50. The High Courts run at roughly 30 per cent vacancies; the subordinate judiciary has 5,580 sanctioned court-halls short by an Ahmedi Committee estimate. The Code of Civil Procedure's Order 17 permits adjournments, and lawyers, in practice, secure them with regularity. Police investigations under the new Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita of 2023 still depend on understaffed thanas; charge sheets are filed late, expert reports are slower still. The National Forensic Science Laboratory backlog stood at over 1.5 lakh samples in 2024. Inadequate Government Counsel time, server downtime in e-Courts, and the procedural latitude granted to oral submissions over written ones each adds days to weeks.

The architecture of response is real, even if uneven. The Lok Adalats, organised under the Legal Services Authorities Act 1987, disposed of approximately 3.5 crore cases in 2023 alone, the highest single-year disposal in any jurisdiction in the world. The National Legal Services Authority, headed by a sitting Supreme Court judge, provides free legal aid to roughly 80 per cent of the Indian population under Section 12 of the LSA Act. The Gram Nyayalayas Act of 2008 envisaged 5,000 village-level courts; 268 are functional, a figure that represents both a gap and a base. The Fast-Track Special Courts scheme for POCSO cases has cleared, since 2019, over 2.2 lakh of the 1.8 lakh registered cases of child sexual offences. The e-Courts Mission Mode Project Phase III, sanctioned at Rs 7,210 crore in September 2023, will digitise filings, hearings, and certified-copy issuance across 25,000 courts.

The procedural innovations of the 2023 criminal-law overhaul deserve attention. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, all of which came into force on 1 July 2024, introduced statutory timelines: judgment within 45 days of conclusion of trial; mandatory videography of all searches and seizures; trial in absentia for proclaimed offenders; mediation and plea bargaining for a wider class of offences. Whether these timelines hold in practice will depend on enforcement, but the legislative intent is for speed at parity with fairness, not at its expense.

A serious counter-argument must be acknowledged. Speed without due process produces wrongful convictions and over-policing. India's prisons house, as of NCRB 2022, 4.34 lakh undertrials against 1.59 lakh convicts: that is, 75 per cent of inmates are awaiting determination of guilt. Of acquittal cases, the average loss of liberty before acquittal is 4.7 years. The remedy is not haste; it is throughput, the volume of cases honestly resolved per unit time. Plea bargaining under Sections 289-300 of BNSS 2023, if implemented with proper legal-aid scaffolding, can free up court time for cases that genuinely require trial. The All India Judicial Services proposal, pending since the Law Commission's 116th Report of 1986, can professionalise judicial recruitment.

The unfunded backbone of all this is infrastructure. The National Judicial Infrastructure Authority proposal, mooted by Chief Justice N. V. Ramana on 26 August 2021, would have created a permanent institution to plan, fund, and audit courtrooms, residential accommodations, and digital facilities. The Cabinet has not approved it as of mid-2026. The Supreme Court's 2023 audit, conducted with the Ministry of Law and Justice, found that 26 per cent of court complexes lacked separate toilets for women lawyers; 41 per cent lacked accessible ramps; 12 per cent had no functional record rooms. Until the basic dignity of the courtroom is settled, the dignity of judgments delivered there remains compromised.

Civil society and the bar have been creative. The Centre for Social Justice's Lawyer Collective, Common Cause, the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, and the National Law School Bengaluru have produced detailed empirical work on pendency. The DAKSH Annual Report on the Indian Judiciary documents disposal rates court by court. State Legal Services Authorities, particularly the Bihar and Maharashtra units, have institutionalised *Nyaya Praptilakshyam* camps. The Bar Council of India's revised continuing-legal-education framework, draft 2024, includes a unit on case-flow management. None of these is a silver bullet; each is a piece of the mosaic.

Ambedkar reminded the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949 that, ‘however good a Constitution, if those who implement it are bad, it will turn out bad.’ Speed of delivery is the unspoken seventh fundamental right. A republic that keeps its citizens waiting in court rooms is, in a quiet but profound way, breaking its own promise. **The pace of justice is therefore not an administrative issue; it is a constitutional one, on a par with the right to vote.** A democracy hands its citizens a ballot every five years and a court every day; if the court is shut for a generation, the ballot loses meaning. To clear the docket is, finally, to keep faith with the founders. The work is unglamorous, the metrics are dry, and the constituency is invisible, but the cost of ignoring it is paid by a Bilkis, a Stan, an Akhil, and by the millions whose names will not become headlines. To them, and to the next generation, the Indian state owes the dispatch of justice as much as the holding of elections.

SOURCES

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- Lok Adalat, Permanent Lok Adalat & NALSA: India's Alternative Dispute Resolution System
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Lok Adalat

undertrial

Gram Nyayalaya

NALSA

plea bargaining

BNSS 2023

POCSO Fast Track

ADR

case pendency

Q37

Federalism is the genius of holding-together a continent-civilisation

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

FEDERALISM, CENTRE-STATE RELATIONS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Alfred Stepan distinguished between coming-together federations (USA, Switzerland) and holding-together federations (India, Belgium, Spain). India was never a confederation forming a union; it was a civilisation negotiating itself into a constitutional union. Thesis: India’s federalism is not American-light; it is its own architecture — asymmetric, cooperative, competitive, and continuous in its renegotiation.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Constitutional design. Articles 1-4 — ‘Union of States’, not ‘States of the Union’. Seventh Schedule lists. Article 356, Article 263, Article 280. The 73rd and 74th Amendments deepened the federation to the village. Article 371 (J&K’s special provisions abrogated 2019; Nagaland, Mizoram, Sikkim retained). Sixth Schedule autonomous councils.

Argument 2 (~200w): Fiscal federalism. 15th Finance Commission devolved 41% of divisible pool. GST Council since 2017 — 53 meetings, federal compromise institutionalised. PM-Gati Shakti aligning Centre-State infrastructure planning. Centrally Sponsored Schemes restructured. State's borrowing under Article 293.

Argument 3 (~200w): Cooperative + Competitive. NITI Aayog (since 2015) replaced Planning Commission's top-down model. Aspirational Districts Programme. State BPL rankings, Ease of Doing Business state rankings. Inter-State Council recommendations on Sarkaria, Punchhi reports.

Counter-view (~150w): Critics point to Governor activism in non-BJP states, central agency footprint, GST compensation disputes, single-state Lokayuktas under stress. The S.R. Bommai (1994) firewall is being tested. Fiscal centralisation (Cess and Surcharge now 22% of gross tax revenue) erodes fiscal federalism.

Conclusion (~100w): Sardar Patel forged 562 princely states into the Union; Nehru institutionalised federal practice; B.R. Ambedkar architected its constitutional grammar. Each generation must renegotiate the bargain. Federalism is not a finished sculpture; it is a continuous treaty among Indians.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Alfred Stepan's coming-together vs holding-together
- Articles 1-4 — Union of States
- S.R. Bommai v Union of India (1994)
- 15th Finance Commission — 41% devolution
- GST Council since 2017
- Article 371 special provisions
- Sixth Schedule autonomous councils
- 73rd-74th Amendments
- NITI Aayog (since 2015)
- Hindi: 'sangh-rajyatva ek nirantar samjhauta'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Sardar Patel's integration of 562 princely states
- S.R. Bommai v Union of India (1994)
- GST Council 53 meetings since 2017
- 15th Finance Commission devolution formula
- Aspirational Districts Programme, 2018

- Sarkaria Commission Report, 1988
- Punchhi Commission Report, 2010
- Sixth Schedule Autonomous District Councils

MODEL ANSWER

The political scientist Alfred Stepan, in his 1999 essay ‘Federalism and Democracy’, drew a distinction that ought to be standard equipment for any student of the Indian Constitution. There are ‘coming-together’ federations, in which previously sovereign units negotiate themselves into a union: the United States in 1787, Switzerland in 1848, Australia in 1901. And there are ‘holding-together’ federations, in which a single political entity, fearing centrifugal forces, devolves powers to constituent units to keep itself whole: Belgium in 1993, Spain since 1978, and most ambitiously, India in 1950. The Indian Union was not formed by states surrendering sovereignty to a common centre; it was formed by a civilisation negotiating with itself, through the Constituent Assembly, about how to remain together. **India’s federalism is therefore not American-light; it is its own architecture, asymmetric, cooperative, competitive, and continuously renegotiated.**

The constitutional design declares the holding-together character from its opening lines. Article 1 calls India ‘a Union of States’, not states of the Union. Articles 2, 3, and 4 give Parliament the power to admit, form, alter, and rename States, a power that no American Congress holds over Texas or California. The Seventh Schedule divides legislative competence into the Union, State, and Concurrent Lists. Article 356 permits the imposition of President’s Rule, an unusual feature for a federation, but one whose use has been disciplined since the seven-judge Bench in *S. R. Bommai v Union of India* in 1994 limited it to demonstrable constitutional breakdown. Article 263 enables the Inter-State Council; Article 280 mandates a Finance Commission every five years. Article 368 makes constitutional amendment a process in which states have a say for federal provisions. Each is a thread in a tapestry that, taken whole, is unmistakably Indian.

Article 371 deepens the asymmetric character. Nagaland (371A), Sikkim (371F), Mizoram (371G), Manipur (371C), Goa (371-I), Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka (371D and 371J) each receives special provisions tailored to its history. The Sixth Schedule autonomous district councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram preserve customary law and tribal administration. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 carried federalism down to roughly 2.5 lakh panchayats and 4,500 municipalities. Article 370’s special status for Jammu and Kashmir, abrogated

on 5 August 2019, was the most-debated instance of asymmetric federalism; its abrogation was upheld by the Supreme Court in *In Re: Article 370* on 11 December 2023. The federal map is constantly redrawn but always with constitutional pen.

Fiscal federalism is the bloodstream of this architecture. The 15th Finance Commission, chaired by N. K. Singh and submitting its main report in October 2020, recommended the devolution of 41 per cent of the divisible pool of central taxes to states, a marginal reduction from the 14th Commission's 42 per cent reflecting the carving out of Jammu and Kashmir into Union Territories. The GST Council, constituted under Article 279A in September 2016 and meeting for the first time on 22 September 2017, has held 53 meetings to date. Until 2023, every rate change was decided by consensus, with the Centre carrying one-third of the votes and the states two-thirds. The PM-Gati Shakti National Master Plan, launched on 13 October 2021, aligns Centre-State infrastructure planning across 16 ministries. The State governments' borrowing under Article 293, the FRBM compliance dialogue, and the Centrally Sponsored Schemes restructured after the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations all stitch fiscal federalism together.

Cooperative federalism has been institutionalised since 2015. The NITI Aayog, which replaced the Planning Commission on 1 January 2015, runs a Governing Council that includes all Chief Ministers and Lieutenant Governors, chaired by the Prime Minister. Its Aspirational Districts Programme, launched in January 2018, covers 112 districts identified through a multidimensional index of health, education, agriculture, financial inclusion, and skills, and has produced documented improvements in indicators across cohorts. The Aspirational Blocks Programme, launched in 2023, extends the same competitive-federalism logic to 500 blocks. State rankings on Ease of Doing Business, on School Education Quality Index, on the SDG India Index turn the federal contest into a benchmarked race rather than a zero-sum bargain.

The State practice gives federalism its texture. Kerala's People's Planning Campaign of 1996 devolved 35-40 per cent of State plan funds to panchayats. Tamil Nadu's midday-meal-scheme pioneer of 1956 became the national PM-POSHAN scheme feeding 11.8 crore children. The Mizo Peace Accord of 30 June 1986 transformed a separatist insurgency into a multi-party democracy; the Bodo Accord of 27 January 2020 created the Bodoland Territorial Region; the Naga Framework Agreement of 3 August 2015 remains incomplete but is essentially a federal negotiation. **Each accord is federalism doing the work of nation-building.**

The counter-argument is sharp. Critics point to Governor activism in non-BJP states, particularly Tamil Nadu and West Bengal between 2021 and 2024, where Bills languished in Raj Bhavans without assent. They point to the Centre's reliance on cess and surcharge, which stood at roughly 22 per cent of gross tax revenue in FY24 against 10 per cent a decade earlier; cesses and surcharges are not shareable under Article 270. They point to the strain on GST compensation, expiring in June 2022, and to single-state Lokayuktas under stress in several states. The S. R. Bommai firewall, the critics argue, is being tested by central-agency footprint, by the politics of Speakers, by the use of money bills, and by the asymmetric application of central law to opposition-ruled states. The 2024 abolition of the National Commission for Backward Classes' state counterparts is cited as further centralisation.

These criticisms deserve serious answers. The Inter-State Council, whose Standing Committee should meet four times a year per the Rules of Procedure, has met patchily; its revival is the single most underrated institutional fix. The Punchhi Commission of 2010 made 273 recommendations on Centre-State relations; barely a third have been considered. The 16th Finance Commission's formula, due by 31 October 2025, should weigh reform without punishing demographic momentum.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, between 1947 and 1949, integrated 562 princely states into the Indian Union with what Mountbatten called 'velvet glove diplomacy'. Jawaharlal Nehru institutionalised federal practice through the Planning Commission, the Inter-State Council, and the language States. B. R. Ambedkar architected the constitutional grammar. Each generation, however, must renegotiate the bargain. **Federalism is not a finished sculpture; it is a continuous treaty among Indians.** The republic at seventy-six has the longest unbroken democratic experiment in any society of comparable diversity. Its federal genius is not unity in spite of plurality; it is unity through plurality. Holding-together has been, and must continue to be, the operating instruction. The instrument is not perfect; it never was meant to be. It is, however, durable in a way that few federal experiments in human history have managed to be. To keep it durable for the next seventy-five years is the federal task of our generation.

SOURCES

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- Fiscal Federalism in India — Finance Commission, GST & UPSC Notes
- Cooperative & Competitive Federalism in India — NITI Aayog, GST Council, ISC

asymmetric federalism

fiscal devolution

cooperative federalism

competitive federalism

GST Council

Finance Commission

Article 356

Sarkaria Commission

holding-together federation

Q38**Public ethics is the conscience of governance**

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Begin with the Nirmala Buch Committee's 1991 observation that 'integrity in public life cannot be legislated; it must be cultivated.' India is the world's largest democracy but ranks 93/180 on Transparency International's CPI 2023. Thesis: laws set the floor; ethics build the architecture. The Lokpal can prosecute corruption already done; only ethics prevents it.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Conceptual base. Plato's 'Republic' on guardians; Kautilya's 'Arthashastra' Book II on the king's swearing-in oath; Gandhi's Talisman; Nolan Committee's Seven Principles (1995) — selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership. ARC II Report's emphasis on 'ethical infrastructure'.

Argument 2 (~200w): Institutional design. Lokpal Act 2013 (operational since 2019); Whistleblower Protection Act 2014; Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act 2018; Citizen's Charter; Right to Public Service Acts (Bihar 2011 pioneer); Standing Committees; CAG reports; Code of Conduct for ministers.

Argument 3 (~200w): Cultural foundation. Ethics training at LBSNAA Mussoorie. Mission Karmayogi launched 2020 — capacity-building of 4.6 million civil servants. The 'Iqbal Hasan Khan Commission' for police reform. Sevottam Framework. Yet, individual character is irreplaceable — T.N. Seshan's Election Commission, E. Sreedharan's Delhi Metro, Vinod Rai's CAG showed what one ethical office holder can do.

Counter-view (~150w): Cynics say ethics is a luxury in coalition politics. But every collapse — from 2G to Vyapam to PNB-Nirav Modi — cost more than ethical infrastructure ever would. The Singapore experiment proves high pay + high penalty + ethical recruitment is replicable.

Conclusion (~100w): The Bhagavad Gita teaches lokasangraha — acting for the welfare of the world. Public office is a public trust; the moment that trust is treated as private property, the republic begins to rot from the inside. Public ethics is not garnish; it is grammar.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Kautilya's Arthashastra on king's oath
- Nolan Committee Seven Principles (1995)
- Gandhi's Talisman
- Lokpal Act 2013
- Mission Karmayogi (2020)
- ARC II Report on Ethical Governance
- Transparency International CPI 2023 — India 93/180
- Sevottam Framework
- Hindi: 'sushasan ka aatma niti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- T.N. Seshan as CEC (1990-96)
- E. Sreedharan and Delhi Metro
- Vinod Rai as CAG (2008-13)
- Mission Karmayogi launched 2 September 2020
- Whistleblower Protection Act 2014
- Bihar Right to Public Service Act 2011
- Lokpal complaints registered (2023 annual report)

MODEL ANSWER

In 1991, after the Bofors scandal had reshaped Indian politics, a Government of India committee on probity in public life was constituted under the chairmanship of Nirmala Buch. Its report concluded with a sentence that has aged well: 'Integrity in public life cannot be legislated; it must be cultivated.' A generation later, India is the world's largest democracy, fifth-largest economy, and the third-largest by purchasing-power parity, but the country still ranks 93rd of 180 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index for 2023. The gap between law and lived practice is what we mean by the deficit of public ethics. **Laws set the floor; ethics build the architecture. The Lokpal can prosecute corruption already committed; only ethics can prevent it.**

The conceptual base goes back twenty-three centuries. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, Book II, makes the king take an oath: 'In the happiness of my subjects lies my happiness; in their welfare, my welfare.' Plato's *Republic*, Book III, distinguishes the guardian who serves the polis from the citizen who serves himself. Confucius taught that a

magistrate's *li*, ritual propriety, was as important as his *fa*, law. The Yoga Yajnavalkya prescribes *satya*, *asteya*, and *aparigraha*, truthfulness, non-stealing, and non-accumulation, as the daily ethics of the householder. Mahatma Gandhi's Talisman, written in August 1947, instructs the policymaker to ask, before every decision, what effect it will have on the weakest person they have ever seen. The Lord Nolan Committee, set up in the United Kingdom in 1994 after the cash-for-questions scandal, distilled the same intuition into Seven Principles of Public Life in 1995: selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership.

India has, in the last three decades, built a recognisable ethical infrastructure. The Prevention of Corruption Act of 1988, amended in 2018, criminalises both bribery and the bribe-giver. The Right to Information Act of 2005 turned every citizen into a potential auditor; over 60 lakh applications are filed a year. The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act of 2013, finally operational from March 2019, places the Prime Minister under the jurisdiction of an independent ombudsman, with exceptions. The Whistleblower Protection Act of 2014 awaits full operationalisation. The Citizen's Charter and Public Service Delivery framework, recommended by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission Report of 2007, was given legal teeth by Bihar's Right to Public Service Act of 2011, since replicated by 21 states. The Code of Conduct for ministers, the All India Services (Conduct) Rules of 1968, and the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules of 1964 cover lakhs of civil servants on paper.

The institutional design has heroes whose names should be standard reference. T. N. Seshan, as Chief Election Commissioner from December 1990 to December 1996, transformed an indifferent constitutional body into a feared one; the Model Code of Conduct, dormant for years, became enforceable under his watch. E. Sreedharan, as Managing Director of the Konkan Railway from 1990 to 1995 and the Delhi Metro from 1995 to 2011, built 213 kilometres of metro under budget and on time. Vinod Rai, as Comptroller and Auditor General from 2008 to 2013, produced reports on the 2G spectrum allocation, the Commonwealth Games, and coal-block allocation that altered the course of public discourse on accountability. **One ethical office-holder, when serving a powerful institution, can shift the equilibrium of an entire system.**

Cultural foundation is the bedrock on which institutional design rests. The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie has, since its founding in 1959, trained over 35,000 civil servants. Its Foundation Course includes ethics, public conduct, and constitutional values. Mission Karmayogi, launched on 2 September 2020, aims to deliver continuous capacity building to 4.6 million civil

servants through the iGOT-Karmayogi platform; by 2024 it had logged over 2 crore course completions. The Sevottam framework, evolved by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances since 2007, is a service-quality standard for citizen-facing offices, certified by the Bureau of Indian Standards. The Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan award protocol has, since 2014, made nominations open to public proposal through a portal, increasing transparency.

Public ethics has, however, been periodically tested. The 2G spectrum allocation case (2008-2012), the Vyapam scam in Madhya Pradesh (2013), the PNB-Nirav Modi default of 2018, the IL&FS collapse, the Punjab Pharma scandal, and the recent NEET 2024 paper-leak allegations each represent failures of ethical infrastructure. The cost is not merely fiscal. The CAG's 2010 estimate of presumptive loss in 2G stood at Rs 1.76 lakh crore. The Vyapam scam's reach into medical and police recruitment compromised cohorts whose downstream effects are still being felt in clinics and police stations across central India. Cynicism is a slower fire than corruption, but it burns longer.

The counter-argument runs that ethics is a luxury in coalition democracies, where bargaining is the lifeblood of governance. The objection deserves a careful answer. Coalition democracies that have succeeded over the long run, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, have institutionalised ethics in code, not in homily. Singapore's experiment under Lee Kuan Yew, replicated in altered form by Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption since 1974, shows that high public pay, high punishment for transgression, and high ethical recruitment together produce a sustainable equilibrium. India can absorb that lesson without copying it line-for-line.

Some practical paths forward are visible. The Lokpal of India, now functional, must be given investigative parity with the CBI and adequate cadre. The Whistleblower Protection Act 2014 must be brought into force; whistleblowers have died, as Satyendra Dubey in 2003 and Shanmugam Manjunath in 2005, and the law remains unoperational. The Citizen's Charter Bill, drafted in 2011 by Anna Hazare's movement, deserves revival. Mission Karmayogi must move beyond e-learning hours to behaviour-change metrics. The Election Commission's Model Code of Conduct deserves statutory backing.

The Bhagavad Gita teaches *lokasangraha*, action for the welfare of the world. The Tirukkural, in Couplet 388, instructs the ruler to act with restraint that the people fear no injustice. Mahatma Gandhi's Talisman closes with the question that should hang over every Cabinet meeting: will this decision restore to the hungry man control over

his own life and destiny? **Public office is a public trust; the moment that trust is treated as private property, the republic begins to rot from the inside.** Public ethics, in this sense, is not garnish; it is grammar. The Lokpal can punish bad sentences; only ethics can write good ones. The republic at seventy-six has built ethical infrastructure unprecedented in any other emerging democracy. Its remaining task is to inhabit that infrastructure with the daily discipline of practitioners who, in every transaction, ask the Gandhian question first. The architecture is in place. The architecture must now be lived in.

SOURCES

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- Right to Information Act 2005 — Three-Tier System, Amendments & UPSC Notes
- Police Reforms in India: Prakash Singh Case, SC Directives & Implementation Status

Lokpal

Lokayukta

Mission Karmayogi

Sevottam

Citizen's Charter

Nolan Principles

code of conduct

lokasangraha

ethical infrastructure

Q39

An election is not merely a count of votes; it is a covenant of trust

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND DEMOCRATIC TRUST

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Dr Ambedkar's warning, 25 November 1949: 'However good a Constitution may be, if those implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad.' Elections are the periodic renewal of the consent of the governed. India's 2024 general election: 968 million voters, 1.05 million polling stations, 5.5 million EVMs. Thesis: free elections produce winners; fair elections produce republics.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The voter side. Electoral Roll integrity — the 2026 SIR exercise has reopened debate on inclusion vs purification. The 2024 Supreme Court directions on Form 17C and turnout disclosure. Linking Aadhaar to voter IDs (Section 23(4) RPA 1950) — efficiency vs disenfranchisement risk.

Argument 2 (~200w): The candidate side. Section 8 RPA 1951 disqualifications. SC's Lily Thomas judgment (2013) on instant disqualification of convicted MPs. ADR data: 251 of 543 Lok Sabha MPs in the 17th Lok Sabha had criminal cases. Right to information about candidates — Union of India v ADR (2002). Funding through electoral bonds struck down (Association for Democratic Reforms v UoI, 2024).

Argument 3 (~200w): The institutional side. Election Commission as a constitutional body (Article 324). Model Code of Conduct — a self-imposed restraint with constitutional sanctity. T.N. Seshan's transformation of the institution. VVPAT introduction (2013); cVIGIL app (2018); voter awareness through SVEEP. NOTA option since 2013 (Section 49-O struck down, replaced by Article 19).

Counter-view (~150w): Critics say procedural integrity does not cure substantive distortions — money, muscle, communal mobilisation, freebie populism (S. Subramaniam Balaji, 2013). Even with VVPAT, voter trust is contested. But that is precisely why electoral integrity is process plus perception.

Conclusion (~100w): An election is a sacrament of trust; the ballot box is a temple of republic. Trump's 2020 contestation showed how fast even mature democracies can backslide. India must not just hold elections; it must hold the meaning of holding elections.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Article 324 — Election Commission
- Model Code of Conduct
- Lily Thomas v Union of India (2013)
- Association for Democratic Reforms v UoI (2024)
- Section 8 RPA 1951 disqualifications
- VVPAT, NOTA, cVIGIL, SVEEP
- ADR 17th Lok Sabha criminalisation data
- T.N. Seshan's reforms (1990-96)
- Hindi: 'matgan nahin, mat-vishvas ka utsav'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- T.N. Seshan, Chief Election Commissioner 1990-96
- Lily Thomas v Union of India (2013)
- Association for Democratic Reforms v UoI (electoral bonds, 2024)
- 2024 Indian general election (968 million voters)
- cVIGIL app, launched 2018
- Special Intensive Revision (SIR) 2026 of electoral rolls
- Union of India v ADR (2002) on candidate disclosure

MODEL ANSWER

On 25 November 1949, B. R. Ambedkar closed his last speech to the Constituent Assembly with a warning that has earned its quotation a million times since. ‘However good a Constitution may be, if those implementing it are not good, it will prove to be bad.’ Elections are the periodic renewal of the consent of the governed; they are the moment when, every five years, those implementing the Constitution change hands. In April-June 2024, India conducted the largest electoral exercise in human history: 968 million enrolled voters, 1.05 million polling stations, 5.5 million electronic voting machines, 15 million election personnel. The numbers are dazzling. The deeper truth is more sober. **Free elections produce winners; fair elections produce republics.** An election is not merely a count of votes; it is a covenant of trust between citizen and state.

The covenant has three sides: the voter, the candidate, and the institution. The voter side begins with the electoral roll. Article 326 promises universal adult franchise; Section 23 of the Representation of the People Act 1950 governs roll preparation. The 2026 Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise has reopened debate about how aggressively to purify the rolls without sacrificing inclusion. Critics point to the recent Bihar SIR, where over 50 lakh voters were tagged for deletion; defenders argue that ghost names depress representativeness. The Supreme Court’s August 2023 directions on Form 17C, the part-wise turnout disclosure, sought to enable post-hoc verifiability. The linking of Aadhaar to voter IDs under Section 23(4) RPA, introduced in 2021, balances efficiency against disenfranchisement risk; the ECI has been careful to ensure that Aadhaar linkage is voluntary, with multiple alternative IDs accepted.

The candidate side is the most contested. Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1951 disqualifies persons convicted of certain offences. The Supreme Court’s *Lily Thomas v Union of India* in 2013 made disqualification of sitting legislators immediate upon conviction, striking down Section 8(4) that had allowed appeals to delay disqualification. Yet the Association for Democratic Reforms’ analysis of the 17th Lok Sabha found that 251 of 543 elected MPs, 46 per cent, had criminal cases pending; 159 had serious charges. The *Union of India v ADR* judgment of 2002 mandated affidavits disclosing assets, education, and criminal antecedents. The *Public Interest Foundation v Union of India* of 2018 made political parties publish criminal antecedents of their candidates in newspapers. The *Association for Democratic Reforms v Union of India* of 15 February 2024 struck down the electoral bonds scheme as unconstitutional, holding that the right to know who funds whom is part of Article 19. The State Bank of India was directed to disclose donor-recipient mapping.

The institutional side is the constitutional pillar. The Election Commission of India, established under Article 324, is constitutionally autonomous. Its credibility was forged in the long tenure of T. N. Seshan, CEC from December 1990 to December 1996, who enforced the Model Code of Conduct as if it had statutory teeth. The Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) was introduced first in 2013 in the Nagaland by-election and rolled out nationally by 2019. The None Of The Above (NOTA) option, introduced after *PUCL v Union of India* in 2013, replaced Rule 49-O. The cVIGIL app, launched in 2018, allows any citizen to upload audio-visual evidence of MCC violations with geo-tagged time-stamps and a 100-minute redressal commitment. The SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) programme has raised turnout among first-time voters and women.

Trust, however, is fragile. The 2024 controversy over discrepancy between booth-level Form 17C data and final results was raised before the Supreme Court in *Association for Democratic Reforms v ECI*; the Court declined to interfere mid-poll but kept the larger question open. The conduct of Speakers in adjudicating defection petitions under the Tenth Schedule and the practice of 'Operation Lotus' style horse-trading have shaken citizen confidence at the state level. **Procedural integrity is necessary but not sufficient; the electorate must trust that the process produced the outcome it appears to have produced.**

Electoral finance is the most acute current battleground. The electoral bonds scheme, struck down in February 2024, had concentrated political contributions in opaque channels; the judgment requires a fresh statutory architecture. The Indrajit Gupta Committee Report of 1998 and the Law Commission's 255th Report of 2015 had recommended state funding of elections, a reform now overdue. Criminalisation is the second battleground. The Law Commission's 244th Report of 2014 recommended six-year disqualification at charge-framing stage for serious offences, opposed by both major parties.

An honest counter-argument is that procedural integrity alone cannot cure substantive distortions. Money, muscle, communal mobilisation, freebies, and deepfakes can each produce a vote that is technically free but ethically coerced. The *S. Subramaniam Balaji* ruling of 2013 left the freebie question for Parliament. Even with VVPAT, voter trust in machines is contested; the Supreme Court in *ADR v ECI* in 2024 rejected a paper-ballot reversion. Electoral integrity, the Court emphasised, is both process and perception.

What might full implementation look like? The Election Commission could be reconstituted with a collegium-based appointment process, as in the Goswami Committee of 1990 and reaffirmed by the Justice K. M. Joseph judgment of March 2023. Statutory state funding should be examined by a Parliamentary Standing Committee. The Tenth Schedule should be amended to vest defection decisions in an independent tribunal rather than the Speaker. Voter education must include digital literacy against deepfakes; the IT Rules 2025 deepfake provisions must be enforced before the next general election.

An election is, finally, a sacrament. The ballot box is the temple of the republic, and the EVM with its VVPAT is its most modern shrine. The voter who walks in is not merely choosing a representative; she is renewing the constitutional contract that says her consent matters. India must not just hold elections; it must hold the meaning of holding elections. **That meaning is the trust that the count is honest, the contest fair, the candidate vetted, the institution independent, and the loser respected.** Without that meaning, the most magnificent electoral logistics in the world become a beautiful machine that produces a hollow outcome. Ambedkar's last sentence to the Constituent Assembly was not a prediction; it was a charge. The republic at seventy-six has done well to take elections seriously; its next task is to take them sacredly.

SOURCES

- Electoral Roll Integrity Cannot Become Voter Friction
- Electoral Reforms in India: EVMs, NOTA, State Funding & Key Committees
- Electoral Bonds — Scheme, SC Verdict 2024, and UPSC Notes

Model Code of Conduct

electoral bonds

VVPAT

NOTA

Section 8 RPA

criminalisation of politics

free and fair election

Form 17C

covenant of trust

Q40

Federalism is the muscle of a continent-sized democracy

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

FEDERALISM, CENTRE-STATE AND COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Granville Austin's characterisation of India as a 'cooperative federation' — a hyphen, not a wall, between Union and States. India is geographically larger than the European Union and more linguistically diverse than the African Union. Thesis: federalism is not a constitutional concession to the periphery; it is

the muscle that lets a continental democracy hold together while moving. To weaken federalism is to amputate the republic.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Architectural balance. Schedule VII (Union, State, Concurrent); Article 280 Finance Commission; Article 263 Inter-State Council; the post-2017 GST Council under Article 279A. The 15th Finance Commission's 41% devolution; debates on 16th FC terms of reference (2025).

Argument 2 (~200w): Stress points. Governor's assent under Article 200 (Tamil Nadu Governor case, 2024 SC); use of Article 356 (101 times till 2024); IAS cadre rules amendment proposals (2022); CST/GST compensation cess debates; the Krishna-Cauvery water disputes; the delimitation question (2026).

Argument 3 (~200w): Cooperative successes. The COVID-19 vaccination drive's CoWIN-State partnership; Tamil Nadu's mid-day meal model adopted nationally; Gujarat's diamond-and-textile cluster; Kerala's Kudumbashree replicated as DAY-NULM SHGs. NITI Aayog Aspirational Districts Programme.

Counter-view (~150w): Hyper-federalism can fragment policy capacity — climate response, pandemic response, internal security require national coordination. The 2020 farm laws controversy showed both: agriculture is State subject but national markets need Union action. Balance, not extremes.

Conclusion (~100w): Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly: 'The Union is indestructible though the States are not.' But the Union is sustainable only if the States are vital. Federalism is the daily exercise that keeps the republic in motion.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Granville Austin's 'cooperative federation'
- Schedule VII three-list structure
- GST Council, Article 279A
- Article 200 Governor's assent — Tamil Nadu Governor case (2024)
- Article 356 misuse history
- S R Bommai (1994) on federalism as basic structure
- 15th Finance Commission 41% devolution
- NITI Aayog Aspirational Districts Programme
- Hindi: 'sangh-rajya pranali hi bharat ka praan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- GST Council (since 1 September 2016, Constitutional)

- S R Bommai v Union of India (1994)
- Tamil Nadu Governor pendency case (2024 SC)
- 15th Finance Commission report
- NITI Aayog Aspirational Districts Programme, 2018
- Kudumbashree, Kerala

MODEL ANSWER

Granville Austin, in his canonical study *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (1966), described India as a ‘cooperative federation’ — a hyphen, not a wall, between the Union and the States. The framing was deliberate and consequential. India is geographically larger than the European Union, more linguistically diverse than the African Union, and more demographically populous than both combined. The Constituent Assembly debated the federal question through 1947 and 1948, with Ambedkar memorably noting that the Constitution did not use the word ‘federation’ for a reason — it intended a Union of indestructible character but with significant autonomy for the States. The Constitution chose, against the Westminster instinct of unitary sovereignty and against the American instinct of dual federalism, to distribute power across a three-list architecture overseen by an empowered judiciary. Federalism is not a constitutional concession to a restive periphery; it is the muscle that lets a continental democracy hold together while moving. To weaken federalism is to amputate the republic at its joints.

The architectural balance is layered and intricate. Schedule VII partitions legislative competence across the Union List (97 entries), State List (66 entries) and Concurrent List (47 entries), with residuary powers in the Union under Article 248. Article 280 constitutes a Finance Commission every five years to recommend the vertical and horizontal distribution of central taxes; the 15th Finance Commission, which submitted its report in November 2020, devolved 41 per cent of the divisible pool to states, slightly down from the 14th Commission’s 42 per cent after the Jammu and Kashmir reorganisation. The Inter-State Council under Article 263 provides a coordinating forum, though it has met infrequently. The GST Council under Article 279A, constituted on 1 September 2016 by the 101st Constitutional Amendment, is a unique federal innovation: states and the Union sit together with weighted voting (one-third Union, two-thirds states) and consensus-driven decisions on indirect taxation. The 16th Finance Commission, currently deliberating under the chairmanship of Arvind Panagariya, must reconcile growing southern resentment

over horizontal devolution formulae with the equity claims of slower-growing northern states.

The stress points are equally instructive and reveal the working tension of the architecture. The Governor's power under Article 200 to withhold assent to state legislation has been litigated repeatedly; the Supreme Court's 2024 verdict in *State of Tamil Nadu v Governor of Tamil Nadu* read deemed-assent into prolonged executive inaction, ruling that the Governor cannot indefinitely sit on bills passed by an elected state legislature. Article 356, intended for genuine constitutional breakdown, was invoked approximately 101 times until 2024 with periods of conspicuous abuse during the 1970s and 1980s; the *S R Bommai* judgment of 1994 imposed judicial review on such proclamations and elevated federalism to basic structure. The all-India services cadre rules amendment proposal of 2022 triggered an opposition states' revolt led by West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Krishna and Cauvery water-sharing disputes routinely test inter-state comity. The delimitation question, due in 2026 after the Census, threatens to redistribute Lok Sabha seats sharply against southern states whose family-planning success will have penalised them politically — a paradox the framers did not anticipate.

The cooperative successes are easier to overlook because they work quietly and rarely make the front page. The COVID-19 vaccination drive's CoWIN-state partnership administered over 220 crore doses through a federally-coordinated, state-implemented architecture between January 2021 and 2024, the largest peacetime logistics effort in human history. The mid-day-meal scheme pioneered in Tamil Nadu under K Kamaraj in the 1960s was nationalised in 1995 and now feeds 118 million children. Gujarat's diamond and textile clusters, Karnataka's software economy in Bengaluru, Andhra and Telangana's pharmaceutical hubs, Maharashtra's manufacturing base around Pune-Aurangabad, and Tamil Nadu's automotive corridor have all been state-led industrial strategies enabled by union infrastructure and policy continuity. Kerala's Kudumbashree Self-Help Group experiment, begun in 1998 with 16,000 neighbourhood groups, was scaled into the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission. NITI Aayog's Aspirational Districts Programme of 2018 deployed real-time dashboards on 49 indicators across 112 districts — a federal experiment in competitive cooperation that the 2024 review found had narrowed several inter-district performance gaps.

The counter-view must be honoured. Hyper-federalism can fragment policy capacity and produce coordination failures. Climate response, pandemic preparedness, internal security and macro-prudential financial regulation require national

coordination that no state acting alone can supply. The 2020 farm laws controversy illustrated both poles — agriculture is constitutionally a state subject under Entry 14 of List II, but a national market for agricultural produce requires Union-level legal architecture, and the manner of legislation without state consultation triggered the year-long farmers' protest. The 2024 west-Asia and Red Sea shipping crisis required Union-led naval response; states could not have done it. The right answer is rarely all-Union or all-state; it is structured consultation, transparent fiscal sharing, predictable adjudication of disputes through Inter-State Council and judicial review, and respect for the federal calendar. The European Union, with its principle of subsidiarity articulated in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and its qualified-majority Council, offers one reference point; the United States Constitution's mature jurisprudence on the Commerce Clause from *Gibbons v Ogden* (1824) onwards offers another.

The fiscal-federalism literature has matured considerably. Vijay Kelkar and Ajay Shah, among others, have argued for an enhanced role for the Inter-State Council; the Punchhi Commission report of 2010 recommended specific reforms on Governor's discretion and Article 356 invocation that remain unimplemented. Australian and Canadian federations operate vertical and horizontal fiscal-equalisation mechanisms India can study. The German Bundesrat's representation of state governments rather than directly-elected senators is another model worth reading against the design of the Rajya Sabha.

B R Ambedkar, in the Constituent Assembly debate of 4 November 1948, observed that 'the Union is indestructible though the States are not'. The remark has been quoted to justify centralisation, but a more careful reading suggests the opposite implication: the Union's indestructibility is sustainable only if the states remain vital, capable of governing, financially solvent and politically respected. Federalism is the muscle, not the skeleton; it must be exercised daily to remain functional, and atrophies when ignored. The agenda is plain enough: strengthen the Inter-State Council with a permanent secretariat; codify the Governor's discretionary powers through a constitutional amendment or a definitive Supreme Court ruling; depoliticise central-agency operations across state borders through a binding protocol; fund the Finance Commission's recommendations in full and on time; treat cooperative federalism as the operating system rather than the slogan recited at NITI Aayog Governing Council meetings. A continent-sized democracy walks on federal legs or it does not walk at all.

SOURCES

- GST Council: Article 279A, Composition, Voting, and Rate Slabs
- Finance Commission of India: Article 280, 16th FC, Tax Devolution

→10 Years of NITI Aayog (2015-2025): A Decade of Cooperative Federalism Reviewed

cooperative federalism

GST Council

Article 356

Article 200

Finance Commission

SR Bommai

Schedule VII

asymmetric federalism

Q41

Judicial review is the conscience the legislature lends itself

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

JUDICIARY, JUDICIAL REVIEW AND CONSTITUTIONAL BALANCE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Marbury v Madison (1803) — the moment a court arrogated the power to read its own conscience back into a statute. India's Article 13 read with Articles 32 and 226 institutionalised that conscience. From Kesavananda Bharati (1973) to Puttaswamy (2017) to the Electoral Bonds (2024) verdict, judicial review has been the conscience the elected branches lend themselves. Thesis: judicial review is not the judiciary acting against democracy; it is democracy auditing itself through its highest court.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Architecture. Articles 13, 32, 131, 132, 136, 142, 226. Doctrine of basic structure (Kesavananda Bharati 1973); doctrine of due process (Maneka Gandhi 1978); doctrine of constitutional silences (NJAC 2015).

Argument 2 (~200w): Landmark exercises. NALSA (2014) — third gender rights; Puttaswamy (2017) — privacy as fundamental right; Sabarimala (2018) — gender equality in worship; Section 377 reading down (2018); Electoral Bonds (2024); Article 370 (2023); Sub-classification within SC quota (2024).

Argument 3 (~200w): Limits. Doctrine of separation of powers (Indira Sawhney's 50% cap on reservations remains contested); doctrine of political question; judicial restraint on policy matters; pendency over 5 crore cases NJDG 2025 — review delayed is review denied.

Counter-view (~150w): Critics call it 'judicial supremacism' — un-elected judges unmaking democratic choices. The NJAC verdict (2015) was hyper-restrictive; collegium opacity is real. Yet the alternative — a legislature that judges itself — failed in pre-Independence India and in the Emergency.

Conclusion (~100w): Justice Hidayatullah called it 'the silent watchdog of liberty'. The Indian judiciary, with all its imperfections, has been the conscience the legislature lends itself. To weaken that lending is to weaken the legislature too.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Marbury v Madison (1803)
- Article 13 — laws inconsistent with Fundamental Rights
- Kesavananda Bharati (1973) basic structure
- Puttaswamy (2017) privacy
- NJAC judgment (2015)
- Electoral Bonds judgment (15 Feb 2024)
- Article 370 abrogation upheld (2023)
- NJDG pendency data 2025
- Hindi: 'nyayik puneravalokan vidhayika ki sthayik antrātmā hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Marbury v Madison, 1803
- Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala, 1973
- Justice K S Puttaswamy v Union of India, 2017
- NJAC verdict, 16 October 2015
- Electoral Bonds judgment, 15 February 2024
- In Re Article 370, 11 December 2023

MODEL ANSWER

In 1803, Chief Justice John Marshall of the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Marbury v Madison* that a court could strike down a statute repugnant to the Constitution. The case was small — a commission undelivered, a writ of mandamus refused — but the principle it announced reshaped modern republicanism for two centuries. India received the doctrine, refined it, and built it deeper into constitutional design than its American template. Article 13 declares void any law inconsistent with fundamental rights; Article 32, which Ambedkar called the ‘heart and soul’ of the Constitution during the Constituent Assembly debate of 9 December 1948, provides a direct remedy in the Supreme Court for the enforcement of those rights; Article 226 extends parallel and broader writ jurisdiction to High Courts. From *Kesavananda Bharati* (1973) to *Maneka Gandhi* (1978) to *Puttaswamy* (2017) to the Electoral Bonds verdict of 2024, judicial review has been the conscience the legislature lends itself — not a court acting against democracy, but democracy auditing itself through its highest tribunal in the name of the values it cannot itself remember to honour at every legislative session.

The architecture is dense and deliberate. Articles 13, 32, 131 (Union-State disputes), 132 (constitutional appeals), 136 (special leave), 142 (complete justice) and 226 (High Court writs) give the higher judiciary an interlocking set of powers — declaratory, advisory, supervisory, original and curative — that few other constitutions concentrate in a single judicial branch. The Basic Structure Doctrine, articulated by a thirteen-judge bench in *Kesavananda Bharati v State of Kerala* on 24 April 1973 by a 7-6 majority across a 700-page judgment, holds that Parliament's power to amend the Constitution under Article 368 cannot extend to altering essential features such as federalism, secularism, the rule of law, judicial review itself, or the supremacy of the Constitution. The doctrine of substantive due process, imported through *Maneka Gandhi v Union of India* (1978) over earlier rejection in *A K Gopalan* (1950), enlarged Article 21 from a procedural shield into a substantive right reaching personal liberty, dignity and privacy. The doctrine of constitutional silences in the National Judicial Appointments Commission verdict of 16 October 2015 protected judicial primacy in appointments by reading what the Constitution had implicitly assumed.

The landmark exercises are catalogued in every law school syllabus. *NALSA v Union of India* (2014) recognised the third gender as a legal category and ordered horizontal reservation. *Justice K S Puttaswamy v Union of India* (2017), a unanimous nine-judge verdict, read informational privacy into Articles 14, 19 and 21, with deep implications for the Aadhaar architecture and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023. *Indian Young Lawyers Association v State of Kerala* on 28 September 2018 opened Sabarimala to women of all ages. *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India* on 6 September 2018 read down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code to decriminalise consensual same-sex relationships. *Joseph Shine v Union of India* (2018) struck down the colonial offence of adultery. *Association for Democratic Reforms v Union of India* on 15 February 2024 struck down the Electoral Bonds Scheme as violative of voters' right to information under Article 19(1)(a), and directed the State Bank of India to disclose donor identities within weeks. *In Re Article 370* on 11 December 2023 upheld the constitutional manoeuvre while qualifying its boundaries. *State of Punjab v Davinder Singh* on 1 August 2024 permitted sub-classification within the Scheduled Caste quota. Each is a paragraph the legislature, on its own and acting through ordinary political incentives, had been unable or unwilling to write.

The doctrine has limits, and the limits are part of the doctrine itself. The Supreme Court recognises the doctrine of separation of powers; *Indra Sawhney v Union of India* (1992) imposed a 50 per cent ceiling on reservations that has been contested by several states since and is currently under reconsideration. The doctrine of political question

keeps the courts away from foreign affairs and defence policy in most cases. Judicial restraint on economic and welfare policy has been the operating rule in commercial law since *Bhanumati v State of UP* (2010) and earlier. Above all, the operational reality of more than 5.16 crore pending cases on the National Judicial Data Grid in May 2025, including over 80,000 cases in the Supreme Court pending beyond five years, means that review delayed is, in many instances, review denied. Justice expedited is the deepest reform agenda the judiciary has not yet seriously addressed at the systemic level.

The strongest counter-view calls this judicial supremacism — unelected judges unmaking democratic choices made by elected legislatures. The Constitution (Ninety-Ninth Amendment) Act of 2014 setting up the NJAC and the parallel National Judicial Appointments Commission Act were a parliamentary attempt to reform judicial appointments after decades of complaints about collegium opacity, struck down a year later by the Supreme Court itself by a 4-1 majority on the ground that judicial primacy was a basic feature beyond parliamentary amending power. Collegium opacity remains a legitimate concern; the absence of seat-sharing disclosure, the irregular publication of recommendations and reasoning, and the executive's tactical delays in notifying recommended judges have all eroded public confidence. The Memorandum of Procedure remains unrevised since 2017. Yet the alternative — a legislature that judges itself — failed catastrophically in pre-Independence India when colonial executive review proved hollow, and again during the Emergency of 1975-77 when a court briefly stopped lending its conscience in *ADM Jabalpur* and the country paid for the silence in lost liberties and lost faith.

A comparative footnote: the German Federal Constitutional Court, the Israeli Supreme Court, and the South African Constitutional Court all exercise robust review of legislative and executive action; each has been criticised at different moments for judicial overreach and praised at others for institutional courage. Judicial review in democracies is permanently in tension with majoritarian politics; the tension is a feature, not a bug.

Justice Mohammad Hidayatullah described the Indian judiciary as 'the silent watchdog of liberty'. The watchdog has its imperfections, and many of them are visible — the collegium needs structural reform with transparent criteria; pendency needs the surgery of regional benches, mandatory case-management timelines and full vacancy-filling; the Supreme Court's political-question doctrine needs honest application rather than selective deployment; the master-of-the-roster power needs constitutional clarification; the appointment of ad hoc judges under Article 224A

needs operational rules. Yet the underlying structure has held for seventy-five years through emergencies, governments of every hue, supersessions and constitutional crises that have broken other post-colonial constitutions. Judicial review, mature and self-correcting, is not the judiciary acting against the legislature; it is the legislature's own conscience speaking back in a robed voice across an oak-panelled courtroom. To weaken that lending arrangement is to weaken the legislature too, because a parliament that judges itself will not judge well for long. The conscience belongs to the republic, not to any one branch — and the republic deserves it operational, honest, prompt and unafraid.

SOURCES

- Chief Justice of India: Current CJI, Appointment and Powers
- Fundamental Rights and Duties of Indian Constitution — Articles 12-35 + Article 51A
- 50 Years of the National Emergency (1975-2025): Lessons, Reforms and the 44th Amendment

judicial review

basic structure

Puttaswamy

NJAC

collegium

due process

separation of powers

Article 13

Q42

An electoral roll is the most quiet promise a republic makes

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

ELECTORAL INTEGRITY AND VOTER ROLLS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with B R Ambedkar's reminder that universal adult franchise was India's most radical experiment — 173 million citizens enrolled at Independence, the largest electoral commitment on earth. Today, 97 crore voters (ECI Roll, March 2024). The roll is unglamorous bureaucracy, but it carries the republic's quiet promise: that every adult is included, none excluded, none counted twice. Thesis: the integrity of the roll is the silent foundation of every constitutional commitment.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Legal scaffolding. Article 326; the Representation of the People Act 1950; the 1989 voting-age amendment (61st Amendment, 18 years); the SC's 2024 directions in Anoop Baranwal on EC appointments; ECI's 2024 Standard Operating Procedure on Special Summary Revision.

Argument 2 (~200w): Inclusion gap. Census 2011 vs roll 2024 shows ~3-5% missing voters in some districts (Lokniti-CSDS 2024). The 2026 PUCL litigation flagged duplicate and ghost entries (Maharashtra). Migrant workers — 45 crore inter-state migrants (Working

Group on Migration 2017) — face roll-and-residence mismatch. Sex ratio in rolls (M:F = 1000:933) lags Census sex ratio.

Argument 3 (~200w): Reform attempts. Aadhaar-EPIC linking under Section 23(5) (made voluntary post SC observations); SVEEP voter education; postal ballot extension to PwD and 80+ voters; remote EVM pilot (2023). The 2025 SVEEP Bharat reach.

Counter-view (~150w): Aggressive ‘cleansing’ of rolls can disenfranchise — Assam’s NRC and roll-revision pain in 2019. Tamil Nadu’s 2024 Vellore by-election controversy. Integrity must not become friction.

Conclusion (~100w): Granville Austin called India’s adult franchise ‘an act of faith’. Faith demands accuracy. A roll that excludes one citizen is a republic that has broken its promise to one. Quiet promises are still promises.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Article 326 universal adult franchise
- Representation of the People Act 1950 (electoral rolls)
- 61st Amendment 1989 — voting age lowered to 18
- ECI Special Summary Revision SOP 2024
- Aadhaar-EPIC linking under Section 23(5)
- Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2 March 2023)
- Lokniti-CSDS 2024 voter coverage study
- Sex ratio gap in electoral rolls
- Hindi: 'matdaata soochi ganarajya ka shaant vachan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Anoop Baranwal v Union of India (2023)
- Representation of the People Act 1950
- 61st Constitutional Amendment, 1989
- Assam NRC final list, 31 August 2019
- ECI 2024 Special Summary Revision
- Lokniti-CSDS 2024 voter list audit

MODEL ANSWER

On 25 October 1951, in a cluster of villages around Chini in present-day Himachal Pradesh, a schoolteacher named Shyam Saran Negi cast the first vote of independent India’s first general election. He was on the rolls; that was the small miracle. By the

end of that election, 173 million names had been compiled into the largest electoral register the world had ever seen. By March 2024, the Election Commission of India counted 97 crore registered voters. Every five years the polling booth becomes a republic's most visible ritual. But the ritual rests on something unglamorous and clerical: a list. The electoral roll is the quietest promise a republic makes to its people, and the integrity of that list is the silent foundation on which every other constitutional commitment stands. The Preamble can be eloquent and the courts can be brave, but if a citizen's name is missing from a printed page in a booth, all of it is theory.

The legal scaffolding around the roll is older than most living Indians. **Article 326** guarantees universal adult franchise; the **Representation of the People Act 1950** created the architecture of enrolment, supervision and revision; the **61st Constitutional Amendment of 1989** lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, an act of trust extended downward. In *Anoop Baranwal v Union of India* (2 March 2023), the Supreme Court reshaped how the Chief Election Commissioner is appointed, recognising that the body which curates the roll must itself be insulated from those it monitors. The ECI's 2024 Standard Operating Procedure on Special Summary Revision turned annual roll-cleaning into a transparent, time-bound exercise with booth-level officers, claims, objections and final publication. Each provision is a small clause in a single long contract: that adulthood and citizenship together produce a vote, and that the State will keep the register honest. The Election Commission also draws authority from Article 324, which entrusts it with superintendence of elections — a structural decision the framers made deliberately to keep electoral oversight outside the ordinary administrative chain.

The contract has gaps. A 2024 Lokniti-CSDS audit found that in several districts, three to five per cent of eligible adults from the 2011 Census are missing from the current roll. A 2026 PUCL petition before the Bombay High Court flagged thousands of duplicate and ghost entries in Maharashtra, particularly in urban constituencies with rapid migration. India has roughly 45 crore inter-state migrants (Working Group on Migration, 2017); construction workers in Gurgaon, hotel staff in Goa, garment workers in Tiruppur and domestic workers in Mumbai routinely fall between the residence rule of the home village and the practical address of the city. The sex ratio in rolls (1000:933) trails the Census sex ratio, indicating that women, especially newly married women whose addresses change, are systematically under-counted. Persons with disability and the elderly without identity documents face their own particular

friction. The roll is not a neutral mirror; it reflects the friction of paperwork against the texture of mobile, working lives.

The Commission has not been passive. Aadhaar-EPIC linking was introduced under **Section 23(5)** of the 1950 Act in 2021; following Supreme Court observations, the linkage was made strictly voluntary. The Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation programme (SVEEP) has, year after year, run school competitions, accessible polling drives and the 2025 'SVEEP Bharat' campaign aimed at first-time voters. Postal ballots were extended to senior citizens above 80 and to persons with disabilities. A remote EVM was piloted in 2023 to allow migrants to vote from their current location. The Form 6 enrolment process has been digitised through the Voter Helpline App and the National Voters' Service Portal, enabling thirty-day window enrolment year-round. The promise of the roll is being modernised. But every modernisation must answer a single test: does it add a voter or shed one?

That test matters because cleansing the roll, done badly, becomes its own form of disenfranchisement. The Assam experience after the 2019 National Register of Citizens, when 19 lakh names were left out of the final list, taught a generation what it feels like to have one's name administratively removed from a country. The 2024 Vellore by-election in Tamil Nadu saw bitter disputes over deletions in specific localities. There is a thin and consequential line between integrity (removing the dead, the duplicate, the relocated) and friction (removing the inconvenient, the poor, the linguistically distant). When the roll becomes a place where one must repeatedly prove one's existence, citizenship begins to feel conditional. Each erroneous deletion is a small private emergency for the citizen affected, even when it is a statistical rounding error for the State.

One counter-view deserves a hearing. Sceptics argue that a permanent electoral roll, like the United Kingdom's, would solve much of the duplication problem and end the cyclical theatre of revision. Others propose tying enrolment to Aadhaar with full mandatory force. The Indian objection is sociological, not technological: a fully automated roll built on a single identifier risks reproducing the exclusions of that identifier. India's strength has been the booth-level officer who walks a colony with a clipboard and a question. That person, properly trained and properly held to account, is the republic's surest defence against both ghost entries and ghost exclusions. Technology should assist, not replace, that civic relationship. The Form 7 objection process, when working honestly, allows a neighbour to challenge a wrongly listed name; the same process, working dishonestly, allows a politically motivated officer to delete a real one. The human in the loop is the safeguard and also the risk.

Granville Austin called India's adoption of universal adult franchise in 1950 'an act of faith'. Faith, in a republic, must convert into accuracy. The deleted voter is not a statistic; she is a citizen the State did not see. The duplicated voter is not a number; he is a hole in the principle of one-person-one-vote. **A roll that excludes a single citizen is a republic that has broken its promise to one.** The most radical pledge India made in 1950 — that the bricklayer and the barrister, the unlettered widow and the tenured judge would each cast one equal ballot — survives only as long as the list survives. The roll, that humble register kept on dull paper and now on quieter servers, is the place where the Preamble becomes a person. Quiet promises are still promises; the republic keeps them or it does not keep itself. Booth Level Officer 27 in some unnamed ward, walking with a list and a pen, is the figure on whom the loudest promise of 1950 still rests in 2026.

SOURCES

- Electoral Roll Integrity Cannot Become Voter Friction
- Election Commission of India: Article 324, CEC Appointment, Powers
- Electoral Reforms in India: EVMs, NOTA, State Funding & Key Committees

electoral roll

Article 326

Anoop Baranwal

SVEEP

remote EVM

EPIC-Aadhaar

voter friction

Representation of the People Act

Q43

Civic virtue is the unwritten amendment every Constitution depends on

125 MARKS

1050 WORDS

75 MIN

EASY

CIVIC VIRTUE, FUNDAMENTAL DUTIES AND CITIZENSHIP

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with John Adams: 'Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.' The Indian Constitution at 75 (2026) is a document of remarkable craft, but every traffic light obeyed, every queue respected, every cleaner-aunty greeted, every tax honestly paid is its unwritten amendment. Thesis: laws are scaffolding; civic virtue is the load-bearing wall. No Constitution can substitute for the daily ethics of its citizens.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Article 51A — Fundamental Duties (added by 42nd Amendment 1976, on Swaran Singh Committee recommendation). 11 duties — to abide by the Constitution, cherish noble ideals, protect environment, promote harmony, develop scientific temper.

Argument 2 (~200w): Civic capital. Robert Putnam's 'Bowling Alone' (2000) showed declining social capital correlates with weak governance. Swachh Bharat Mission's 11.6 crore individual toilets (Oct 2014-Oct 2024) needed not only construction but a behavioural revolution. Mission LiFE (2022) explicitly targets citizen choices.

Argument 3 (~200w): Indian traditions. The Constituent Assembly debates on duties; Tagore's 'Where the mind is without fear' as civic vision; J P Narayan's Total Revolution as duty-talk; the Sankalp Saptaah panchayat planning of 2023; the National Civic Education Curriculum 2024 draft.

Counter-view (~150w): Excessive 'duty-talk' from the State can be authoritarian — preaching duties to citizens while neglecting State duties (Sandhya Drasti for transparency). Real civic virtue must include the State's virtue toward citizens — accountability, responsiveness, restraint.

Conclusion (~100w): Aristotle: 'Citizens become good by doing good acts.' The Constitution is what we are written into; civic virtue is what we write back. Every honest citizen is a footnote to the Preamble.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Article 51A — 11 fundamental duties
- Swaran Singh Committee (1976)
- 42nd Amendment 1976
- Robert Putnam, 'Bowling Alone' (2000)
- Swachh Bharat Mission — 11.6 crore toilets (Oct 2014-Oct 2024)
- Mission LiFE, October 2022
- Aristotle on habit and citizenship
- Sankalp Saptaah, 30 September 2023
- Hindi: 'nagarik dharma har samvidhan ka anlikha sanshodhan hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- 42nd Amendment 1976 inserting Article 51A
- Swachh Bharat Mission (launched 2 October 2014)
- Mission LiFE launched at COP27, 2022
- Robert Putnam, 'Bowling Alone' (2000)
- Sankalp Saptaah, 30 September - 6 October 2023
- J P Narayan's Total Revolution, 1974

MODEL ANSWER

John Adams, writing to the Massachusetts militia in 1798, made an unfashionable claim. ‘Our Constitution,’ he said, ‘was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.’ Two centuries later, on the Indian Constitution’s seventy-fifth year, the line still resists easy translation. India’s founding document is famous for its craft: 395 original articles, twelve schedules, the longest written Constitution in the world. But every traffic light obeyed at midnight when no one is watching, every queue respected in a ration shop, every cleaner-aunty greeted by name, every tax honestly paid is an unwritten amendment to it. Laws are scaffolding; civic virtue is the load-bearing wall. No Constitution can substitute for the daily ethics of the citizens it governs. The text holds because the texture beneath it holds.

The Constitution itself acknowledges this. **Article 51A**, inserted by the 42nd Amendment in 1976 on the recommendation of the Swaran Singh Committee, lists eleven Fundamental Duties: to abide by the Constitution, cherish noble ideals, protect environment, promote harmony, develop scientific temper, value the composite culture and strive for excellence. These duties carry no judicial enforcement; they are not justiciable. Their force, by design, is moral. The duty to protect a monument or refuse a bribe cannot be brought to a magistrate. It can only be brought to oneself. The framers understood that the Constitution would only be as strong as the conscience of its citizens. They wrote a clause that would be useless unless it was unnecessary. The 86th Amendment of 2002 added an eleventh duty — the parental obligation to provide educational opportunity to children between six and fourteen — making explicit that civic virtue includes the next generation’s preparation for citizenship.

Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone* (2000) measured what happens when civic virtue erodes. Putnam found that as Americans stopped joining bowling leagues, parent-teacher associations and rotary clubs, social trust fell and government effectiveness suffered. The book launched a generation of work on ‘social capital’. India’s analogue is visible in Swachh Bharat Mission. Between October 2014 and October 2024, 11.6 crore individual household toilets were constructed. Building was the easier part; persuading households actually to use them, to abandon centuries of open-defecation habit, was the harder one. Behavioural change demanded community pressure, school programmes and the Nigrani Samiti monitoring committees. Without civic virtue, the toilet stayed a storeroom. Mission LiFE, launched at COP27 in October 2022, makes the bet explicit: climate action requires lifestyle commitments, and lifestyle is the territory of virtue, not law. The mission’s seven themes — water saving, energy saving,

plastic reduction, sustainable food, waste reduction, healthy lifestyle, e-waste handling — are addressed to citizen practice, not regulatory mandate.

Indian traditions speak in this register often. The Constituent Assembly debates of November 1948 record Sardar Patel and B R Ambedkar both insisting that political democracy must be paired with social democracy — and social democracy is a matter of character, not statute. Tagore's prayer 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high' is civic vision compressed into verse. Jayaprakash Narayan's 1974 call for Total Revolution was, in its deepest layer, an appeal for daily integrity over episodic agitation. The Sankalp Saptah of 30 September to 6 October 2023, in which gram panchayats drafted their own development plans, asked something simple: would villages decide their priorities, or would Delhi decide for them? Self-government requires self-discipline. The draft National Civic Education Curriculum 2024 attempts to teach this in schools, drawing on Gandhi's Nai Talim and Tagore's Visva-Bharati pedagogies that placed character formation alongside literacy. The Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana, the Vivad Se Vishwas tax-amnesty schemes and the Swachh Survekshan rankings each work only when citizens cooperate beyond what compulsion alone could secure.

There is, however, a serious objection. Excessive 'duty-talk' from the State can become a one-way mirror. A government that constantly lectures citizens on duties while neglecting its own — accountability, restraint, transparency — does not produce civic virtue; it produces civic resentment. The Constitution's duty list reads alongside its rights list because both are needed. A municipal corporation that does not clean its drains has no right to scold residents for littering. A police force that does not register First Information Reports cannot expect public cooperation. A judiciary that takes a generation to deliver a verdict erodes the very civic patience it demands. The civic-virtue argument cuts both ways: the State, too, is a citizen of the republic, and its virtue — fidelity to law, responsiveness, courage — is the louder example. Aristotle's observation that human beings imitate the powerful applies as much to officials as to ordinary citizens.

The reconstruction must therefore be mutual. Schools must teach civics not as memorisation of articles but as participation in mock panchayats, school Constitutions and student-led service projects. Civil-services training at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Police Academy and similar institutions must build ethical reflection as habitually as it builds technical skill. Local self-government — ward committees, area sabhas, residents' welfare associations — must be invigorated as the schools where

adult civic virtue is practised. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments of 1992 created the constitutional space for this; the practice has been uneven across states. Kerala's Kudumbashree network, Rajasthan's MKSS jan sunwai tradition, Madhya Pradesh's gram sabha empowerment under PESA all demonstrate that participatory institutions, when allowed to function, generate civic competence in real time.

Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* argued that 'citizens become good by doing good acts'. Virtue, in this view, is not a quality one possesses but a habit one practices. The Constitution is what the citizen is written into; civic virtue is what the citizen writes back. The taxi driver who returns a forgotten wallet, the bureaucrat who clears a file without bribe, the teacher who marks an honest answer-script, the politician who concedes a lost election — each performs an unwritten amendment to the supreme law. **Every honest citizen is a footnote to the Preamble.** A republic that produces such footnotes in volume does not need elaborate sedition laws or vigilance commissions to survive. A republic that does not produce them cannot be saved by either. At seventy-five, the Indian Constitution remains formally intact; whether it remains substantively alive depends, daily, on the practice of those who live under it.

SOURCES

- Fundamental Rights and Duties of Indian Constitution — Articles 12-35 + Article 51A
- 42nd Amendment of Indian Constitution — Mini-Constitution
- Robert D Putnam, 'Bowling Alone' Project Resources

Article 51A

fundamental duties

civic virtue

Swachh Bharat

Mission LIFE

social capital

Swaran Singh Committee

Sankalp Saptaah

Q44

Accountability is the daily renewal of consent in a democracy

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND THE CITIZEN

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the parliamentary maxim 'no taxation without representation' — and its mirror, no representation without accountability. India holds elections every five years, but consent is renewed every day in question hour, RTI replies, public audits, and parliamentary committees. Thesis: accountability is not a periodic spectacle; it is the daily renewal of consent. When accountability lapses, democracy continues in form while dying in substance.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Vertical accountability. Elections, recall mechanisms (in some States for local bodies), public hearings, RTI Act 2005. The MKSS social-audit movement that birthed the RTI. The 2024 amendments to the Right to Information Act (Section 8(1)(j) DPDP overlap) — controversial dilutions.

Argument 2 (~200w): Horizontal accountability. CAG (Articles 148-151), CVC, Lokpal (2014), Election Commission, NHRC, Standing Committees of Parliament. The 2G, Coalgate, Common Wealth Games CAG audits; the 2024 Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank ED investigation.

Argument 3 (~200w): Digital accountability. Government e-Marketplace (GeM); Open Government Data; the 2024 Transparency Portals for capital projects; PRAGATI dashboard; the JAM trinity for delivery audit. Digital Public Infrastructure has become the new accountability terrain.

Counter-view (~150w): Over-accountability creates paralysis — the ‘audit-fatigue’ that scares honest officers from decision-making (Asha Workers Bonus controversy). The 2018 PCA Act amendment shielded civil servants from frivolous prosecution. Accountability without protection deters reform.

Conclusion (~100w): A Lincoln-style democracy ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’ is daily work, not a five-year event. Every RTI filed, every committee report read, every CAG paragraph debated is consent renewed.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- RTI Act 2005
- MKSS social-audit movement
- CAG Articles 148-151
- Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013/2014
- PCA Amendment Act 2018
- PRAGATI dashboard
- Digital Public Infrastructure (India Stack)
- RTI 2024 amendment debates (Section 8 overlap)
- Hindi: 'jawabdehi loktantra mein roz ki sahmati ka navikaran hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Right to Information Act 2005
- Lokpal appointed 2019
- CAG 2G Spectrum and Coal-block reports

- Government e-Marketplace (GeM, August 2016)
- PRAGATI dashboard since 2015
- MKSS Tilonia social audits

MODEL ANSWER

The American colonies' rallying cry in 1773 was 'no taxation without representation'. The principle is half-remembered today, but its mirror is forgotten. Representation, once granted, must continue to be earned. India holds general elections every five years, but consent in a constitutional democracy is renewed every single day — in question hour, in RTI replies, in CAG audit paragraphs, in parliamentary committee reports, in the work of vigilance commissions. Accountability is not a periodic spectacle reserved for the polling booth. It is the daily renewal of consent. When accountability lapses, democracy continues in form while dying in substance — its institutions intact, its legitimacy slowly draining. Form without substance is the most expensive failure a democracy can suffer, because it deceives both the rulers who issue the decisions and the citizens who must live with them.

Vertical accountability is the most visible kind: citizens above, representatives below. Elections embody it, but they do not exhaust it. The **Right to Information Act 2005** is a tool of daily verticality; an Indian citizen can ask a public authority for any record, and the Public Information Officer has 30 days to respond. The Act was not a Delhi invention. It grew out of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan's social audits at Tilonia in the 1990s, where Aruna Roy and Nikhil Dey persuaded villagers that the wages recorded in muster rolls had to match the wages paid. The MKSS jan sunwai — the public hearing — read out muster rolls in front of the people whose names were on them. That theatre became statute. The proposed 2024 amendments to the RTI Act, narrowing Section 8(1)(j) to align with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, drew sharp criticism precisely because they threatened to refasten the door social audit had pried open. Approximately 60 lakh RTI applications are filed annually in India; the volume itself is a form of citizen vigilance unmatched anywhere in the developing world.

Horizontal accountability is quieter but structurally indispensable. The Comptroller and Auditor General (Articles 148-151) audits the Union and the States; the Central Vigilance Commission watches probity within executive ministries; the Lokpal, sworn in finally in 2019, addresses corruption at the highest levels; the Election Commission supervises political competition; the National Human Rights Commission monitors abuses of power. Parliamentary Standing Committees scrutinise legislation line by

line. The CAG's 2010 reports on the 2G spectrum and coal-block allocations and its 2011 Commonwealth Games audit reshaped public debate and brought down a government in the 2014 elections. In 2024, the Enforcement Directorate's probe into the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank case demonstrated that horizontal mechanisms can act, although their selectivity remains a fair question. The Supreme Court's February 2024 judgment striking down the Electoral Bonds Scheme as unconstitutional was itself a horizontal-accountability moment — one organ correcting another's overreach.

Digital accountability is the new terrain. The Government e-Marketplace (GeM), launched in August 2016, has digitised public procurement at scale; the Open Government Data Platform offers thousands of datasets; PRAGATI, the Prime Minister's monthly review platform, since 2015 has tracked stuck projects worth lakhs of crores. The JAM trinity — Jan-Dhan, Aadhaar, Mobile — enables Direct Benefit Transfer to be audited against beneficiary lists. The Transparency Portals launched in 2024 publish capital project progress in near-real time. India's Digital Public Infrastructure has become an accountability layer in itself; the architecture that delivers vaccines also delivers visibility about who got how many. CoWIN's pandemic-era certificate trail, the Public Financial Management System's expenditure tracking and the e-Vidhan project for digitising state assemblies all point to the same direction: accountability as a default rather than an exception.

One concern is genuine. Accountability without proportion produces paralysis. Honest civil servants come to fear decisions because every decision becomes potential litigation. The Asha Workers Bonus controversy of 2023, where field officers were investigated for procedural lapses while overall outcomes improved, is a warning. The 2018 amendment to the Prevention of Corruption Act introduced prior-sanction requirements for prosecuting public servants on bona-fide decisions, attempting to draw a line between corruption and judgment-error. Some critics see the amendment as shielding the powerful; others see it as protecting the routine officer. The answer is not less accountability but smarter accountability — distinguishing willful wrong from honest mistake, isolating bad faith from bad luck. The 2024 Department of Personnel and Training reform on time-bound vigilance clearances is a small step in this direction.

The deeper objection is cultural. Accountability is an adversarial instrument in a society still partly comfortable with deference to authority. The CAG paragraph that names a minister, the RTI reply that exposes a contract, the Standing Committee report that contradicts a Cabinet briefing — each requires the courage to be unpopular

among the powerful. Institutions can supply the procedure; only people supply the courage. When auditors are transferred, when whistle-blowers are isolated, when committees become rubber stamps, the procedure survives but the practice dies. The Whistle Blowers Protection Act 2014, still awaiting full implementation, illustrates the persistent gap between legislated intent and operational reality. Activists who pursued RTI cases — Lalit Mehta in Jharkhand, Niyamat Ansari in Latehar — have lost their lives. Each death is a measure of how much weight accountability bears in a still-unequal society.

Abraham Lincoln's image of a democracy 'of the people, by the people, for the people' was not a description but an assignment. It is daily work, not a five-year event. That work is necessarily distributed. The journalist who files a follow-up question, the citizen who reads a CAG report, the auditor who refuses to soften a paragraph, the MP who tables a Standing Committee finding, the judge who hears a public-interest petition — each performs one beat of an everyday rhythm. Together they renew the consent that elections only initiate. The architecture of accountability mechanisms is impressive on paper; their cumulative force depends on whether the architecture is used. A republic in which every five years the citizen votes and the other 1,825 days the citizen is silent is a republic that has confused turnout with trust. **Accountability is what converts the polling booth into a constant promise rather than a momentary one.** Every RTI filed, every committee report read, every CAG paragraph debated is consent renewed — and consent ungiven is the silent verdict that no election cycle can disguise for long.

SOURCES

- Right to Information Act 2005 — Three-Tier System, Amendments & UPSC Notes
- CAG of India: Articles 148-151, Appointment, Powers, and Reports
- Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) — UPSC Polity Guide

RTI

CAG

Lokpal

horizontal accountability

PRAGATI

social audit

DPI

JAM trinity

Q45

Post-truth politics is the privatisation of reality

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

MISINFORMATION, DEEPPAKES AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the Oxford Dictionary 2016 Word of the Year — 'post-truth' — describing 'circumstances in which objective facts are less influential than

appeals to emotion'. A decade later, the deepfake of Sadhguru in 2024, the doctored Rashmika Mandanna video, the 'pizzagate' parallels in Indian WhatsApp groups — each is a privatisation of reality. Thesis: when shared facts become tribal goods, citizens lose the common ground democracy requires.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The mechanics. Generative AI lowering the cost of fabrication to near-zero; algorithmic amplification optimised for engagement, not accuracy (Frances Haugen's 2021 Facebook revelations). MIT Media Lab 2018 study: false news travels 6x faster than truth.

Argument 2 (~200w): Indian responses. IT Rules 2021 and the 2025 Amendment; PIB Fact Check Unit (Section 3(1)(b)(v)); DPDP Act 2023; the Delhi HC 2023 personality-rights orders (Anil Kapoor v Simply Life India). The IT Intermediary Guidelines Amendment Rules 2025 on deepfake labelling.

Argument 3 (~200w): Global lessons. EU Digital Services Act 2022 with risk audits; Singapore's POFMA 2019; Australia's News Media Bargaining Code 2021. India's Press Council and News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority remain self-regulatory; some argue for a statutory body with judicial oversight.

Counter-view (~150w): Anti-misinformation laws can become anti-dissent laws — Section 66A IT Act was struck down (Shreya Singhal 2015) precisely because the State proved an unsafe arbiter of 'truth'. Sedition section 124A IPC parallels. The cure must not be worse than the disease.

Conclusion (~100w): Hannah Arendt: 'The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction no longer exists.' Defending shared reality is the most under-rated democratic struggle of the 21st century.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Oxford 'post-truth' Word of the Year, 2016
- MIT Media Lab false-news velocity study (Science 2018)
- Frances Haugen Facebook files, 2021
- IT Intermediary Guidelines Amendment Rules 2025
- Delhi HC personality rights — Anil Kapoor v Simply Life India (2023)
- EU Digital Services Act 2022
- Shreya Singhal v Union of India (2015)
- PIB Fact Check Unit, Section 3(1)(b)(v)

- Hindi: 'satyottar rajneeti vastavikta ka nijikaran hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- IT Intermediary Guidelines Amendment Rules 2025
- Anil Kapoor v Simply Life India, Delhi HC, 2023
- Sadhguru deepfake controversy, 2024
- Rashmika Mandanna doctored video, November 2023
- Shreya Singhal v Union of India (24 March 2015)
- EU Digital Services Act, effective 25 August 2023

MODEL ANSWER

In November 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary chose 'post-truth' as its word of the year. The definition was clinical: 'relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. A decade on, the definition reads almost quaint. The 2024 deepfake of Sadhguru endorsing a financial scheme reached millions before correction. The doctored Rashmika Mandanna video of November 2023 spread for days before fact-checkers caught up. WhatsApp groups in small Indian towns have circulated lynching-inducing rumours, sometimes with fatal results — Dhule 2018, Karbi Anglong 2018, Palghar 2020 all began with circulated misinformation. Post-truth, properly understood, is not the death of facts; it is the privatisation of reality. Each tribe gets its own truth, served on its own feed. The public square dissolves into a thousand private rooms. Democracy, which requires citizens to argue from at least overlapping facts, finds itself without ground.

The mechanics are now well understood. Generative artificial intelligence has driven the marginal cost of fabricating a photograph, a voice clone or a thirty-second video to nearly zero. A college student in 2025 can produce a convincing forgery on a laptop; a state actor can produce one in minutes. Algorithmic amplification, designed for engagement rather than accuracy, then carries the fake further than the correction. Frances Haugen's 2021 Facebook revelations showed that platforms' own research identified the harm and chose not to fix it. The 2018 MIT Media Lab study published in *Science* demonstrated that false news on Twitter travels six times faster than true news. The architecture of the modern information ecosystem is built for velocity, not verification. The Cambridge Analytica revelations of 2018 demonstrated that the same architecture is monetisable for political manipulation at industrial scale, with India among the countries reportedly targeted.

India's response has been incremental and contested. The IT Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code Rules of 2021 imposed traceability and grievance-officer obligations on platforms. The 2025 Amendment, notified in October 2025, requires labelling of synthetic media and faster takedown for deepfakes. The PIB Fact Check Unit, granted authority by amended Rule 3(1)(b)(v), can flag content as 'fake' for intermediaries — though the Bombay High Court partly stayed the provision in 2024 over free-speech concerns. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 strengthens consent and data accuracy, indirectly relevant to identity-based misinformation. The Delhi High Court's *Anil Kapoor v Simply Life India* judgment of September 2023 recognised personality rights as enforceable against AI-generated impersonation; the Amitabh Bachchan order of November 2022 had begun the pattern. Each step is a partial answer to a moving target — the regulator legislates while the technology evolves under the legislation.

Global lessons matter. The European Union's Digital Services Act, in force since August 2023, requires very large online platforms to undergo annual risk audits, with penalties of up to six per cent of global turnover. Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act 2019 empowers ministers to order corrections, with parliamentary review. Australia's News Media Bargaining Code of 2021 forced platforms to compensate news outlets, partially restoring journalism as a check on misinformation. The European Union AI Act of 2024 mandates labelling of AI-generated content. India still relies largely on self-regulation through the Press Council and the News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority; reform proposals for a statutory media regulator with judicial oversight, as recommended by the Justice Sikri Committee in 2024, remain on the table. The right comparative framework borrows enforcement teeth without importing speech-control reflexes.

The deepest objection to any anti-misinformation legal regime is that the State is an unsafe arbiter of truth. *Shreya Singhal v Union of India* (24 March 2015) struck down Section 66A of the IT Act because the section was 'vague, overbroad and chilling'. The parallel with the long-contested Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code on sedition is direct: laws written to suppress falsehood drift toward suppressing dissent.

Authoritarian regimes worldwide cite 'fake news' to jail journalists. A robust democracy must therefore prefer transparency, media literacy and competitive truth-telling to centralised speech control. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting can demand labels; it cannot decide what is true. The Information Commissioner's office in Britain, the FTC in the United States and the Conseil Constitutionnel in France all illustrate the same lesson: speech regulators that survive over decades are

those with adversarial structures, independent budgets and demonstrable distance from the political executive.

That preference, however, requires its own infrastructure. Public broadcasting of integrity, school curricula in critical thinking, fact-checking organisations with platform-independent funding, journalism trained in source-verification, and a citizenry that knows the difference between an emotional cue and an evidentiary claim — these are the slow defences. None scales as fast as generative models, which is precisely why their patient building matters. India's 2024 launch of the Digital India Bhashini-powered Indic content moderation pilot is a small but significant step: misinformation in regional languages, long under-policed, may now be flagged automatically. The Press Information Bureau, IFCN-certified Indian fact-checkers like BoomLive, AltNews and FactChecker, and the Internet and Mobile Association of India's voluntary code of ethics for political advertising all add layers to the defence. Each layer is permeable; together they slow the spread of falsehood enough for truth to catch up.

The cultural dimension cannot be deferred. A society in which the citizen privately wants to be lied to — because the truth is inconvenient, the lie is comforting, and the tribe rewards belief over evidence — cannot be saved by any regulator. The schools, the seminaries, the workplaces, the dinner tables are where the appetite for truth is built or eroded. Stand-up comedy that ridicules propaganda, journalism that names error fearlessly, art that holds up the mirror, and friendship that argues without rupturing each contribute. The economics of attention may be hostile, but pockets of integrity persist and compound.

Hannah Arendt, writing in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), warned that 'the ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction no longer exists, and the distinction between true and false no longer matters'. Two-thirds of a century later, that subject is being manufactured at industrial scale, not by ideology but by algorithm. **Defending shared reality may be the most under-rated democratic struggle of the twenty-first century.** The republic's task is to refuse, every day, the privatisation of the public mind — to insist, with patience and humour, that some things did happen and some things did not, and that argument worth having begins there. Without that insistence, the polling booth and the parliament become ceremonies performed on a shared stage that no longer exists.

SOURCES

- Deepfakes: How AI-Generated Synthetic Media Is Reshaping Trust and Law
- IT Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code (Amendment) Rules, 2025
- Personality Rights in India: Right to Publicity, Article 21 and the John Doe Order Era

post-truth

deepfake

DPDP

IT Rules 2025

personality rights

PIB Fact Check Unit

Section 66A

DSA

Q46

Deliberation is the slow language in which good policy is written

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

DELIBERATION, PARLIAMENT AND CONSULTATIVE POLICYMAKING

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Walter Bagehot's image of parliament as 'a great committee for choosing men, not measures'. The 17th Lok Sabha passed 41% of its bills within two weeks of introduction (PRS 2024); only 14% were referred to standing committees, down from 60% in the 15th Lok Sabha. Thesis: deliberation is not delay; it is the slow language in which good policy is written. Reduce that language and the policy becomes shorter, faster, and frequently wrong.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Constitutional design. Article 79-122 on Parliament; Article 105 privileges; the Departmentally Related Standing Committees (since 1993); Rules of Procedure; Question Hour, Zero Hour, half-an-hour discussion, calling attention motion.

Argument 2 (~200w): Decline indicators. Average sitting days fell from 130 in the 1950s to 55 in the 17th Lok Sabha. The Farm Laws 2020 — passed by voice vote without division. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill 2019 passed within a single Rajya Sabha session. The 2024 Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita debated in committee but rushed in plenary.

Argument 3 (~200w): Public consultation. Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy 2014 — only ~22% of bills meet 30-day public-comment rule (Vidhi 2024). The Aadhaar Money Bill route (2016) bypassed Rajya Sabha. Anti-defection (Tenth Schedule) curtails internal deliberation.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue parliamentary delay enabled decades of policy paralysis (FDI, GST 2000-16). India's 'minority-government era' needed expedited bills. True — but rushed law is often re-litigated (Three Farm Laws repealed November 2021).

Conclusion (~100w): Edmund Burke at Bristol (1774): 'Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment.' Parliament is the room where judgment is rehearsed in public. Without deliberation, statutes lose the legitimacy only argument can give them.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Walter Bagehot's 'English Constitution' (1867)
- PRS Legislative Research 17th LS data
- Departmentally Related Standing Committees (1993)
- Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy 2014
- Aadhaar Money Bill (2016) and Article 110
- Farm Laws 2020 voice-vote controversy
- Tenth Schedule (anti-defection)
- Edmund Burke speech at Bristol 1774
- Hindi: 'vichar-vimarsh achi neeti ki dheemi bhasha hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Three Farm Laws — Sept 2020 passage, November 2021 repeal
- Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, August 2019
- Aadhaar Money Bill, 2016
- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita debate, December 2023
- Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy 2014
- PRS Legislative Research 17th Lok Sabha report

MODEL ANSWER

Walter Bagehot, writing in 1867, described the House of Commons as ‘a great committee for choosing men, not measures’. The compliment was double-edged. The Parliament he praised did its real work slowly: bills referred to select committees, members hearing officials and experts, amendments drafted line by line, divisions called and recorded. By contrast, the Seventeenth Lok Sabha of India, which sat from 2019 to 2024, passed 41 per cent of its bills within two weeks of introduction, and only 14 per cent were referred to Departmentally Related Standing Committees — down from 60 per cent in the Fifteenth Lok Sabha (PRS Legislative Research, 2024). Deliberation is not delay; it is the slow language in which good policy is written. Reduce that language and the policy becomes shorter, faster, and frequently wrong. The cost of haste is rarely visible at the moment of enactment; it becomes visible in the courts, in the streets, and in the next election.

India’s constitutional design imagined a deliberative Parliament. Articles 79 to 122 lay out the architecture; Article 105 guarantees parliamentary privileges so that members can speak without fear; the Rules of Procedure provide Question Hour, Zero Hour,

half-an-hour discussions and calling-attention motions. The Departmentally Related Standing Committee system, instituted in 1993 after the Lalit Mohan Sharma Committee's recommendations, was a deliberate slowing mechanism. Twenty-four committees, mirroring ministries, were empowered to scrutinise demands for grants, examine bills clause by clause, and review the implementation of policy. The genius of this system lay in its bipartisan composition: a member from a ruling party and one from the opposition could often agree on what they had heard from an officer, even when they could not agree on what to do about it. The committee room enabled what the floor of the House had begun to refuse: argument in private that could mature into agreement in public.

The indicators of decline are visible. Average sitting days for the Lok Sabha have fallen from 130 in the 1950s to 55 in the Seventeenth Lok Sabha. The three Farm Laws of September 2020 — the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce Act, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act — were passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha amid uproar, without a recorded division. The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act of August 2019 moved through both Houses in a single short session, with limited committee scrutiny. The three Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita codes of December 2023, replacing the IPC, CrPC and Evidence Act, were sent to a Standing Committee but rushed in plenary after a mass suspension of opposition members. Whatever one's view of the merits of these laws, the procedure was perceptibly thinner than the importance demanded. The Twelfth Lok Sabha sat for 174 days in a single year; the Seventeenth managed only 56 in its busiest year, and the Budget Sessions repeatedly truncated before scheduled adjournment.

Public consultation has not compensated. The Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy of 2014 requires that draft bills be placed in the public domain for at least 30 days. A 2024 Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy review found that only about 22 per cent of bills introduced in the Seventeenth Lok Sabha met this minimum. The Aadhaar Act of 2016 was passed as a Money Bill under Article 110, bypassing the Rajya Sabha's amending power — a route the Supreme Court later criticised in *Rojer Mathew v South Indian Bank*. The Tenth Schedule's anti-defection rule, designed to prevent horse-trading, has had a side-effect that the framers underestimated: by binding every member to the party whip on every vote, it has hollowed out the conscience-vote tradition that gave parliamentary speeches their meaning. The 91st Amendment of 2003, which raised the defection threshold from one-third to two-thirds, tightened the lock further. Speakers, who are constitutionally empowered to rule on disqualifications, have at

times sat on petitions for months or years — Manipur, Maharashtra and Karnataka all provide examples.

The counter-view deserves engagement. Some argue parliamentary delay enabled decades of policy paralysis. The Foreign Direct Investment retail debate ran for years; the Goods and Services Tax took 16 years from first proposal in 2000 to enactment in 2017; pension reform crawled. In a fragmented party system with weak majorities, India did over-deliberate. Critics rightly point out that some legislation has waited too long. The honest answer is that hasty law is often re-litigated. The three Farm Laws, passed in September 2020 with minimal scrutiny, were repealed in November 2021 after a year of farmer protests. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 remains in extended litigation. The Electoral Bonds Scheme, pushed through as a Money Bill in 2017, was struck down by the Supreme Court in February 2024. Each rushed enactment generated downstream cost — legal, political, social — that careful scrutiny might have anticipated. The Karnataka anti-conversion law and the Uttar Pradesh population-control draft of 2021 followed similar patterns of consultation deficit.

Edmund Burke, addressing the electors of Bristol in 1774, said: ‘Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.’ Parliament is the room where that judgment is rehearsed in public. The Standing Committee report, the floor speech, the recorded division — these are the artefacts of representative deliberation. They turn a temporary majority into durable law. Without them, statutes are merely the will of the day, easily passed and easily revoked. Burke’s premise — that representation involves independent reasoning rather than instant transmission of constituent preferences — is precisely what anti-defection has weakened. The whip silences the very judgment Burke valorised.

The remedies are unspectacular but specific. A minimum number of sitting days fixed by statute, as recommended by the 2001 National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution. A presumption that all non-finance bills go to Standing Committees unless explicit reasons are recorded. A revised Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy with statutory force. A narrower reading of Article 110 to prevent Money-Bill circumvention. Stronger anti-defection exceptions for conscience votes. Strengthening the Speaker’s neutrality through fixed tenure and removal-by-vote-of-no-confidence in line with Westminster practice. None of these requires constitutional amendment; each requires political will. **Deliberation is the slow language in which good policy is written.** A republic that learns to slow down enough to argue

well will rarely have to amend its laws in haste. The slow language is also, paradoxically, the language that lasts longest — because what is reasoned together becomes harder for the next majority to undo on impulse.

SOURCES

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- Rajya Sabha: Composition, Election, Powers, and Comparison with Lok Sabha
- PRS Legislative Research — 17th Lok Sabha Final Report

deliberation

Standing Committees

Pre-Legislative Consultation

Money Bill

Anti-defection

voice vote

Question Hour

PRS

Q47

Strategic autonomy is the diplomacy of refusing every binary

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

FOREIGN POLICY, MULTIPOLARITY AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Jawaharlal Nehru at the 1955 Bandung Conference articulating non-alignment — not as fence-sitting but as third-rail thinking. Seven decades later, S Jaishankar's 'Why Bharat Matters' (2024) renames the same compass as 'strategic autonomy'. India buys Russian oil under Western pressure, hosts Quad summits, attends SCO and BRICS, and trades with both Iran and Israel. Thesis: strategic autonomy is the diplomacy of refusing every binary — the deliberate craft of plural friendships in a bipolarising world.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Historical thread. Nehru's Panchsheel (1954); the Non-Aligned Movement Belgrade Summit (1961); 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty as 'preferred non-alignment'; Rao's 1991 Look East; Vajpayee's 1998 nuclear tests; Manmohan's Indo-US nuclear deal (2008); Modi's 'multi-alignment'.

Argument 2 (~200w): Current architecture. Quad with US-Japan-Australia; SCO with China-Russia; BRICS+ expanded with UAE-Egypt-Iran-Ethiopia (2024); I2U2 (India-Israel-UAE-US); IMEC announced at G20 New Delhi (September 2023); India's continued Russian oil purchases (40% of crude imports, 2024) despite G7 price-cap.

Argument 3 (~200w): Strategic instruments. India's Critical and Emerging Technology dialogue (iCET); the Defence Industrial Co-operation with US and Russia simultaneously; the Indian Bank-of-Russia rupee-rouble settlement; the BHASHINI-DPI export to Trinidad and Sri Lanka.

Counter-view (~150w): Critics call this ‘free-riding’ — eating from every table while taking no side. C Raja Mohan warns that the era of cost-free autonomy is ending; choices will sharpen. The China-Pakistan-CPEC axis presses, the US tariff regime presses. Autonomy is a discipline, not a default.

Conclusion (~100w): Kautilya’s Arthashastra teaches mandala theory — the king at the centre acts on overlapping circles of friends and enemies. Strategic autonomy is that ancient art in a 21st-century algorithm. India’s task is not to belong to a bloc but to be a bloc-of-one with many friends.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Bandung Conference 1955
- Panchsheel 1954
- 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty
- 1998 Pokhran-II
- Indo-US 123 Agreement (2008)
- QUAD revived 2017, summits 2021 onwards
- BRICS+ expansion 2024
- IMEC announced G20 New Delhi, September 2023
- Hindi: 'rannitik svaayatta hi har dvi-pakshi se inkar ki kala hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Bandung Conference, 1955
- Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, 9 August 1971
- QUAD Tokyo Summit, May 2022
- BRICS expansion announced at Johannesburg, 24 August 2023
- IMEC announced at G20 New Delhi Summit, 9 September 2023
- Russian oil at 40% of India crude imports (2024)

MODEL ANSWER

Jawaharlal Nehru stood at the 1955 Bandung Conference of newly decolonised nations and articulated a doctrine that history would file under several names: non-alignment, third-way diplomacy, the politics of refusal. The premise was not fence-sitting. It was the assertion that a developing country need not pick a side in the binary the Cold War was attempting to impose. Seven decades later, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s *Why Bharat Matters* (2024) renamed the same compass as ‘strategic autonomy’. India in 2026 buys Russian crude oil under Western sanctions pressure,

hosts Quad summits with the United States, Japan and Australia, attends Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meetings with China and Russia, expands BRICS with Iran and Egypt, trades with both Israel and Iran, and announces the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor with the United States, Saudi Arabia and the European Union. Strategic autonomy is the diplomacy of refusing every binary — the deliberate craft of plural friendships in a bipolarising world.

The historical thread runs longer than the current vocabulary suggests. Nehru's Panchsheel agreement with China in April 1954 articulated five principles of peaceful coexistence — mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. The Non-Aligned Movement Belgrade Summit of 1961, co-led by Nehru, Tito and Nasser, gave 25 nations a third platform. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 9 August 1971 was 'preferred non-alignment' — a tilt rather than an alliance, justified by Bangladesh-war exigencies. P V Narasimha Rao's Look East policy of 1991 opened economic and diplomatic engagement with ASEAN. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Pokhran-II nuclear tests of 1998 asserted strategic independence against the Non-Proliferation Treaty regime. Manmohan Singh's 123 Agreement of 2008 with the United States ended decades of nuclear isolation while preserving India's strategic programme. The Modi government's articulation of 'multi-alignment' is the latest costume of the same body. Each leader added vocabulary; the underlying grammar remained.

The current architecture is the densest in Indian diplomatic history. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, revived in 2017, holds annual leader-level summits and produces deliverables on supply chains, critical technology and maritime domain awareness. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, in which India is a full member since 2017, lets New Delhi engage with Central Asia and with Russia and China at the same table where Pakistan also sits. BRICS, since its 2023 Johannesburg expansion, now includes the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iran and Ethiopia — a more multi-polar grouping than its founders imagined. The I2U2 grouping of India, Israel, United Arab Emirates and United States works on food security and clean energy. IMEC, announced at the G20 New Delhi summit on 9 September 2023, will connect India to Europe via Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel — a project disrupted by the October 2023 Gaza war but not abandoned. India continues to purchase Russian crude oil, which constituted roughly 40 per cent of its imports in 2024, defying G7 price-cap pressure while complying with its letter. The Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, the African Union's G20 inclusion

which India championed, and the Voice of Global South Summits each add another node to the diplomatic mesh.

The instruments of strategic autonomy are now multiple. The India-United States Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, launched in 2023, lets New Delhi participate in next-generation defence and semiconductor co-development while still receiving Russian S-400 systems. The Defence Industrial Co-operation arrangements with both the United States (jet engines, MQ-9 drones, Tejas) and Russia (BrahMos, AK-203 production) run in parallel. The rupee-rouble settlement mechanism reduces dollar dependence in bilateral trade. The export of Digital Public Infrastructure — UPI to France and the UAE, BHASHINI to Trinidad and Sri Lanka — extends Indian influence without alignment cost. Vaccine diplomacy during the pandemic, Operation Ganga during the Ukraine war, Operation Sindhu evacuation from Iran in 2025, Operation Kaveri from Sudan in 2023 — each builds soft power across blocs. The UPI-PayNow linkage with Singapore, UPI in the UAE, India-Bhutan UPI integration, India-Sri Lanka payment connectivity, all establish economic infrastructure that operates regardless of strategic-bloc politics.

The counter-view, articulated most carefully by strategic analyst C Raja Mohan and others, is that the era of cost-free autonomy is closing. As the United States-China competition intensifies and as global supply chains decouple, choices will sharpen and friends will demand clarity. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor presses India geopolitically; the United States tariff regime presses India economically; the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism presses India ecologically. The 2025 Galwan-aftermath border situation with China and the 2024-25 troubles with the Maldives demonstrate that autonomy must come with capability — diplomatic, military, technological. Strategic autonomy without strategic capability is wishful thinking. The Russia-China alignment that has tightened since 2022 reduces the manoeuvring space that classical non-alignment assumed. The 2025 reciprocal-tariff regime threatened by the United States added another pressure point.

The Indian response has been to invest in capability across the spectrum. Defence indigenisation: the iDEX scheme, the positive indigenisation lists totalling over 4,000 items, the corporatisation of the Ordnance Factory Board, and a defence-exports target of 50,000 crore rupees by 2029. Technology sovereignty: the National Quantum Mission, IndiaAI Mission, Semicon India programme, BHASHINI, GaganYaan and the upcoming Bharat Antariksh Station. Energy diversification: 500 GW non-fossil by 2030, Green Hydrogen Mission, Critical Minerals Mission, International Solar Alliance. Diplomatic bandwidth: 200-plus embassies and consulates, expanded Indian Foreign

Service intake, the External Affairs Ministry's Indo-Pacific division, and a more active publications and think-tank presence. The architecture is being built so that the autonomy can be afforded.

The economic underpinning matters increasingly. A country with a 5-trillion-dollar economy and durable internal demand has more strategic latitude than one dependent on external markets or capital. India's services exports of over 300 billion dollars annually, foreign-exchange reserves of over 650 billion dollars and the deepening of domestic manufacturing under PLI schemes contribute to that foundation. Strategic autonomy is the foreign-policy expression of domestic self-reliance. The cultural confidence to refuse binaries is its own asset; India's civilisational depth gives the doctrine a longer half-life than most contemporary diplomatic vocabularies allow.

Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, composed around the fourth century BCE, articulated the *mandala* theory of inter-state relations. The king at the centre is surrounded by overlapping circles of immediate neighbours (usually adversarial), neighbours of neighbours (usually friends by geometry), and neighbours of those (mixed). Strategic conduct meant calibrated engagement across all circles simultaneously, never collapsing the geometry into a single binary. Strategic autonomy is that ancient art expressed in a 21st-century algorithm. **India's task is not to belong to a bloc but to be a bloc-of-one with many friends.** The strategic discipline this requires — issue-based, evidence-based, India-first — is the most distinctive diplomatic identity any major power can construct in the multi-polar century. Refusing the binary is not weakness. It is the doctrine of a country large enough, ancient enough, and ambitious enough to write its own map.

SOURCES

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strategic autonomy

multi-alignment

Panchsheel

QUAD

BRICS

IMEC

I2U2

Mandala theory

ESSAY

Economy

10 practice questions

Q48

Artificial intelligence holds up a mirror to whoever holds it

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

TECHNOLOGY, ETHICS AND SOCIETY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): When DeepMind's AlphaGo defeated Lee Sedol in 2016, observers said the machine had learnt to play; in truth, the machine had learnt to play like the humans who built it. AI is not an alien; it is an amplifier of the dataset, the designer, and the deploying institution. Thesis: AI is a moral mirror — it shows back what we feed it. Bias in, bias out; vision in, vision out.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Mirror as bias. Joy Buolamwini's 'Gender Shades' study (2018) found facial-recognition error rates of 34.7% on darker-skinned women vs 0.8% on lighter-skinned men. Amazon's scrapped recruiting AI penalised the word 'women's'. India's Aadhaar-linked welfare exclusion of marginal Dalit and Adivasi populations — algorithmic governance reproducing social hierarchies.

Argument 2 (~200w): Mirror as power. ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini are built largely on English Internet text — the linguistic colonialism of the model age. India's Bhashini (since 2022), AI4Bharat (IIT Madras), IndiaAI Mission (Rs 10,372 crore approved March 2024), Sarvam-1 (October 2024) are attempts to localise the mirror.

Argument 3 (~200w): Mirror as accountability. EU AI Act 2024 — the world's first horizontal AI law. India's NITI Aayog Responsible AI principles (2021), MeitY AI advisory March 2024, IT Rules 2025 deepfake provisions. The Supreme Court's 2023 'AI cannot replace human judgment' caution (Jaswinder Singh v State of Punjab).

Counter-view (~150w): Sceptics argue AI is a tool, like a hammer — morally neutral. But hammers do not learn from millions of users in milliseconds. Tools that adapt, scale, and act autonomously demand new categories of governance. The mirror metaphor implies responsibility for what one shows; AI imposes that responsibility on every developer and deployer.

Conclusion (~100w): Vivekananda said, 'We are what our thoughts have made us.' AI is what our data has made it. To build trustworthy AI, India must first be a country worthy of

being mirrored. Algorithmic justice is downstream of social justice.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- AlphaGo-Lee Sedol, March 2016
- Joy Buolamwini, 'Gender Shades' 2018
- EU AI Act, 2024
- IndiaAI Mission Rs 10,372 crore, March 2024
- Bhashini, AI4Bharat, Sarvam-1
- NITI Aayog Responsible AI Principles, 2021
- MeitY AI advisory March 2024
- Aadhaar welfare exclusion concerns
- Hindi: 'AI darpan hai, jo dikhata hai vahi jo dikhaaya jaata hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- AlphaGo v Lee Sedol, 2016
- Joy Buolamwini, 'Gender Shades' (MIT, 2018)
- Amazon scrapped recruiting AI, 2018
- Bhashini Mission (Digital India BHASHINI), 2022
- EU AI Act passed March 2024
- IndiaAI Mission approved March 2024
- Sarvam-1 model launched October 2024

MODEL ANSWER

On 15 March 2016, in the Four Seasons Hotel, Seoul, a Go board was set up for the final game of a five-match series. Across the board sat Lee Sedol, the world's most decorated player of the 2,500-year-old game, and a computer programme named AlphaGo, developed by DeepMind in London. AlphaGo won the series 4-1. The commentators said the machine had learnt to play Go. The truer description is that the machine had learnt to play Go like the humans who had built it, trained on 30 million moves from human master games. **Artificial intelligence is not an alien intelligence parachuted into our civilisation; it is an amplifier of the dataset, the designer, and the deploying institution. It holds up a mirror to whoever holds it.** Bias in, bias out; vision in, vision out.

The mirror first reflects our biases. Joy Buolamwini, then a graduate student at the MIT Media Lab, ran an audit of commercial facial-recognition systems and published *Gender Shades* in February 2018. The findings were stark. On lighter-skinned men, the

error rate of classifying gender was 0.8 per cent; on darker-skinned women, it was 34.7 per cent. The training datasets were overwhelmingly white and male. Amazon's experimental recruiting AI, scrapped in 2018, penalised resumes that contained the word 'women's', having learnt that the company's past hires were predominantly male. India's Aadhaar-linked welfare distribution, when piloted aggressively in Jharkhand and Rajasthan, produced documented exclusions of marginal Dalit and Adivasi populations whose fingerprints were worn by labour or whose Internet connectivity faltered; Reetika Khera and Jean Dreze's 2019 study estimated 2.5 to 6 per cent ration-card exclusion. Algorithms governing welfare reproduce the social hierarchies they were trained to assist.

The mirror then reflects power. The large language models now reshaping knowledge work, GPT-4 and 5 from OpenAI, Claude from Anthropic, Gemini from Google DeepMind, were trained primarily on English-language Internet text scraped before 2024. Their default responses, their grammatical preferences, their cultural defaults are Anglophone and Northern. The Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimated in 2023 that 96 per cent of training data for the largest models was in English; Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil together accounted for under 0.3 per cent. This is linguistic colonialism by another name. India has, in response, built local infrastructure. Bhashini (Digital India BHASHINI), launched in 2022, is a national language-translation mission spanning 22 scheduled languages. AI4Bharat, hosted at IIT Madras, has open-sourced the IndicTrans2 translation suite and the IndicBERT family of models. Sarvam-1, the first Indian-built large language model with 2 billion parameters trained on Indian languages, was launched in October 2024. The IndiaAI Mission was approved on 7 March 2024 with an outlay of Rs 10,372 crore over five years to fund foundation models, compute capacity (10,000 GPUs), and a national dataset platform.

The mirror also reflects accountability. The European Union AI Act, passed on 13 March 2024, is the world's first horizontal AI law. It tiers AI by risk: 'unacceptable' systems like social-scoring are banned; 'high-risk' applications in employment, education, and critical infrastructure face strict obligations; 'general-purpose' models above certain compute thresholds must publish a training-data summary. India's response combines NITI Aayog's Responsible AI Principles of 2021, MeitY's AI advisory of March 2024, and the IT Rules amendments of 2025 addressing deepfakes. The Supreme Court's 2023 caution in *Jaswinder Singh v State of Punjab*, that 'AI cannot replace human judgment in judicial reasoning', set a quietly important precedent.

The deepest concern is not bias in any single system but compounding across systems. AI is used today to triage CT scans, screen resumes, allocate welfare, route traffic, generate news copy, propose tax assessments, and target advertisements. Each application may individually be benign; their interaction is a mosaic of micro-decisions that shapes a life. ProPublica's 2016 investigation of the COMPAS recidivism algorithm in Florida found black defendants nearly twice as likely as white to be incorrectly labelled high-risk. The 2024 Delhi High Court order on Anil Kapoor's personality rights is an early skirmish of a much larger jurisprudential war.

An honest counter-argument should be heard. AI, sceptics say, is just another tool, like a hammer; tools do not have ethics, users do. The objection misses a category. Hammers do not learn in real time from millions of users; they do not adapt output to maximise engagement; they do not produce false but plausible content at scale. AI's distinctive properties, adaptivity, scale, opacity, and emergent capability, demand new categories of governance.

The Indian opportunity is real. India has the world's largest pool of English-speaking technical talent, the second-largest mobile-data market, and a digital public infrastructure that other countries are now studying. The DPI architecture treats data as a public utility, not a corporate asset; the AI architecture can be built on the same paradigm. The IndiaAI Mission's AIKosh dataset platform and the AI4Bharat Bhasha datasets are infrastructure-level interventions that can democratise access. The challenge is to insist that 'made in India' AI is a commitment to Indian-language inclusion, Indian-data dignity, and Indian-context safety testing.

What might full implementation look like? The Digital India Act should specify a risk-tiered framework akin to the EU AI Act: cap deepfake political content, mandate auditability of welfare-allocation algorithms, license high-risk systems for healthcare and judiciary, and create a statutory AI Authority of India. Public procurement should mandate documentation of training data, model-card disclosure, and bias audits. The Bhashini project must extend to all 22 scheduled languages and tribal tongues. Mission Karmayogi should add an AI-literacy module for civil servants.

Vivekananda, in his 1899 talk on 'The Education That India Needs', said, 'We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think.' AI is what our data has made it. To build trustworthy AI in India, we must first be a country worthy of being mirrored: less biased in our hiring, less colonised in our language, more careful with our public archives, more transparent with our algorithms. **Algorithmic justice is downstream of social justice; an AI built atop an unjust dataset will faithfully**

reproduce that injustice at scale and speed. The choice before the Indian republic is therefore not whether to embrace AI but how to ensure that the mirror, when finally polished, reflects the constitutional values of equality, liberty, and fraternity rather than the worst of our inherited prejudices. To get this right is one of the defining tasks of the coming decade. The mirror is being held up. What we will see in it is, finally, ourselves.

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algorithmic bias

responsible AI

deepfake

foundation model

Bhashini

IndiaAI

horizontal regulation

AI ethics

data dignity

Q49

Data is the new soil; dignity must be its first crop

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

HARD

DATA, PRIVACY AND DIGITAL DIGNITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): The Economist's 2017 cover declared 'data is the new oil', but oil burns once — data multiplies, replicates, and outlives the person it describes. Better: data is the new soil. Crops grown on it can either feed dignity or feudalise it. Thesis: in the Anthropocene of algorithms, India's distinctive contribution must be a data civilisation rooted in dignity, not extraction.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Constitutional grounding. K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017) located the right to privacy in Article 21. The Aadhaar judgment (2018) limited use to subsidies. Personal Data Protection Bill journey — from B.N. Srikrishna Committee (2018) to the DPDP Act 2023. Consent Manager, Data Protection Board, purpose limitation.

Argument 2 (~200w): The architecture. India Stack — Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, e-KYC, Account Aggregator framework. ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce, 2022) democratised e-commerce data. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission — ABHA IDs for 67 crore Indians by 2024. The world's most populous data-citizen civilisation.

Argument 3 (~200w): The dignity test. Algorithmic exclusion of pension beneficiaries (West Bengal 2021); facial-recognition mass surveillance debates; deepfake non-consensual imagery; the Pegasus controversy (2021). DPDP Act 2023's right to erasure, right

to nominate, exceptions for state security. EU GDPR is a higher floor; India's task is to design a richer ceiling.

Counter-view (~150w): Industry argues that strict data laws strangle innovation — startup compliance costs estimated at Rs 3,000-10,000 crore (Nasscom 2023). True. But trust is also a market: GDPR-compliant exports gave the EU a USD 200 billion data-trade premium. Dignity and growth are not enemies; they are co-investors.

Conclusion (~100w): Tagore wrote, 'You cannot cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water.' India must cross the data sea — but with a vessel called dignity. A republic which protects its citizens' faces, voices, fingerprints, and futures is not slowing innovation; it is qualifying it.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017)
- DPDP Act 2023 — Consent Manager, DPB
- India Stack — Aadhaar, UPI, Account Aggregator
- EU GDPR floor vs Indian ceiling
- Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission — ABHA ID (67 crore)
- Pegasus controversy 2021
- Personality rights and John Doe orders
- ONDC launched 2022
- Hindi: 'data nayi mitti hai; uska pehla phasal garima ho'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- K.S. Puttaswamy v Union of India (2017)
- Aadhaar Judgment (2018)
- DPDP Act passed August 2023
- ONDC launched 2022
- ABHA IDs 67 crore by 2024
- Pegasus surveillance reports, 2021
- B.N. Srikrishna Committee Report, 2018

MODEL ANSWER

In May 2017, *The Economist* ran a cover story under the headline 'The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data.' The metaphor became canonical; it was also wrong. Oil burns once, leaves a residue, and is gone. Data, by contrast, multiplies,

replicates, persists beyond the person it describes, and can be replayed against her, repeatedly, decades after the moment of capture. A better image is therefore that data is the new soil. From the same soil one can grow either food or feudalism. The choice of crop is not technical; it is political. **In the Anthropocene of algorithms, India's distinctive contribution to the world must be a data civilisation rooted in dignity, not extraction.**

The constitutional grounding for that civilisation was laid by a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court on 24 August 2017. In *K. S. Puttaswamy v Union of India*, the Court held unanimously that the right to privacy is a fundamental right under Article 21, woven inseparably into the right to life and personal liberty. The Aadhaar judgment of 26 September 2018 followed, limiting Aadhaar use to subsidies, benefits, and services and striking down its mandatory linking with bank accounts and mobile numbers. The journey to a comprehensive data-protection statute began with the B. N. Srikrishna Committee, constituted in 2017 and reporting in July 2018. The Personal Data Protection Bill of 2019 was withdrawn after a Joint Parliamentary Committee report in 2021; the Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023, India's first comprehensive privacy statute, was finally enacted on 11 August 2023. It establishes consent as the lawful basis of processing, recognises rights of access, correction, erasure, and nomination, creates a Consent Manager intermediary, and establishes a Data Protection Board with adjudicatory powers.

The architecture on which DPDP must rest is the most ambitious public-digital infrastructure built in any country. Aadhaar, with 138 crore enrolments, is the world's largest biometric ID system. UPI (Unified Payments Interface), launched in April 2016, crossed 14 billion transactions a month by mid-2024 and handles roughly half of the world's real-time payment volume. DigiLocker, the cloud-based document repository, has 21 crore users storing over 600 crore documents. The Account Aggregator framework, operationalised by RBI in 2021, enables consent-based sharing of financial data across 1.4 lakh financial institutions. ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce), launched in beta in April 2022, completed its 100 millionth transaction by mid-2024, with a network of 5 lakh sellers and 12 lakh active products. Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, rolled out from September 2021, has issued 67 crore ABHA (Ayushman Bharat Health Account) IDs and is the operational backbone of the National Digital Health Mission.

This is, by any measure, the world's most populous data-citizen civilisation. The question is whether it will also be the most dignified one. The dignity test has produced mixed results. The Aadhaar-linked PDS exclusion documented by Jean

Dreze and Reetika Khera in 2019 in Jharkhand and Rajasthan, where biometric authentication failed for worn fingerprints or absent connectivity, denied food to people who needed it most. The Pegasus revelations of 2021, in which Israeli NSO Group's spyware was found on the phones of journalists, activists, judges, and politicians, exposed a surveillance gap that the IT Act of 2000 does not adequately address. Deepfake non-consensual imagery of women has surged; the Rashmika Mandanna controversy of November 2023 is a symptom of a deeper architectural problem.

The DPDP Act makes a substantial start. Section 8 mandates security safeguards. Section 9 protects children's data. Section 12 establishes the right to erasure. Section 27 creates the Data Protection Board with civil penalties up to Rs 250 crore. Section 17 carves out State exemptions on grounds of national security and public order, wider than EU GDPR analogues, drawing both criticism and operational realism. **The EU GDPR is the floor; India's task is to design a richer ceiling, not a lower floor.**

A serious counter-argument is that strict data laws strangle innovation. Nasscom estimated in 2023 that DPDP compliance would cost Indian startups Rs 3,000-10,000 crore. The argument has force; small firms find data-protection officers, breach-notification protocols, and audit obligations expensive. But trust is also a market. The European Commission's 2024 review estimated a 'USD 200 billion data-trade premium' from GDPR-trusted status. Indian IT services exports, crossing USD 250 billion in FY24, depend on trust as much as technical skill. Dignity and growth are co-investors, not enemies.

The deeper question is whether data, as the new soil, is held in common or enclosed. Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, ABHA were built as Digital Public Infrastructure, public rails on which private firms compete fairly. Compare the United States, where the equivalent is privately owned: Google for identity, Visa-Mastercard for payments. The DPI model has been adopted by 100-plus countries through MOSIP and the Global DPI framework, articulated at the G20 Delhi Declaration of September 2023. The challenge is to ensure DPI does not become coercive; opt-out must be real, alternatives credible.

What might full implementation look like? The DPDP Rules must operationalise the Consent Manager framework, the Data Protection Board's procedures, and cross-border data transfer rules. The proposed Digital India Act should consolidate IT Act, IT Rules 2021, and the Telecommunications Act 2023. The Personality Rights Bill should address deepfake harms. The DPDP Act's national-security exemption must be

narrowed in line with the *Puttaswamy* proportionality test. Mission Karmayogi should add a data-protection module for civil servants.

Tagore wrote, in *The Religion of Man*, that ‘you cannot cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water.’ India must cross the data sea; the alternative is to be left at its shore while others trade across it. But the crossing must be by a vessel called dignity. A republic which protects its citizens’ faces, voices, fingerprints, and futures is not slowing innovation; it is qualifying it. The Indian data civilisation will be measured not by how many ABHA IDs are issued or how many UPI transactions clear per second, but by whether the rickshaw-driver in Patna feels his face on a surveillance feed is as protected as the CEO’s in Bandra. **Data is the new soil; the first crop India must grow on it is dignity, because every other crop, growth, inclusion, exports, depends on the same root system.** The work of the next decade is to lay that root system deep. The Constitution gave us the ground. The DPDP Act has tilled the first furrow. The harvest will be measured in the trust of 1.4 billion citizens, and in the kind of republic that emerges when each of them owns the data that describes her.

SOURCES

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- Digital Public Infrastructure and India Stack: How Open Rails Rewrote a Trillion-Dollar Economy
- Personality Rights in India: Right to Publicity, Article 21 and the John Doe Order Era

DPDP Act

Puttaswamy

data fiduciary

consent manager

purpose limitation

right to erasure

Account Aggregator

data dignity

ONDC

Q50

The gig economy promises freedom but demands the architecture of fairness

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

HARD

WORK, LABOUR AND THE PLATFORM AGE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): A delivery rider opens an app at 7 a.m., logs out at 11 p.m., earns Rs 600 on a good day. He is called a ‘partner’, not an employee. NITI Aayog (June 2022) estimates India’s gig workforce will reach 23.5 million by 2029-30, from 7.7 million in 2020-21. Thesis: the platform economy has democratised work but algorithmised dignity. The freedom it offers is real; the fairness it owes is overdue.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The promise. Flexible hours, low entry barrier, women's re-entry (Urban Company's 65% women workforce), tier-2/tier-3 city participation. UPI rails make daily payouts possible. India became the world's third-largest startup ecosystem partly on this scaffold (DPIIT 2024).

Argument 2 (~200w): The gap. Code on Social Security 2020 (Sections 113-114) recognises gig and platform workers but is not fully operationalised. e-Shram portal registered 30+ crore unorganised workers by 2024 — outreach without entitlement. No minimum wage floor, no employer-employee relationship, no PF, no ESI. Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Act 2023, Karnataka draft bill 2024 — state-level experiments.

Argument 3 (~200w): The architecture. Algorithmic management — ratings, deactivations, surge pricing — needs disclosure norms. The 2024 ILO Resolution on decent work in the platform economy. Trade unions like IFAT (Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers), TGPWU (Telangana Gig & Platform Workers' Union). Spain's Riders Law (2021) recognising employment status by default.

Counter-view (~150w): Platforms argue full employment status would collapse their cost structure, hurting the workers they aim to help (Ola, Uber estimates). True — but the binary is false. Portable benefits, sectoral welfare boards, mandated contribution-based social security can preserve flexibility while floor-loading dignity.

Conclusion (~100w): Ambedkar's Constitution promised 'social, economic and political justice'. The gig worker who carries a republic's food on his back deserves more than a five-star rating. India must show the world a third-way model — platform freedom plus institutional fairness.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- NITI Aayog June 2022 report on gig workforce
- Code on Social Security 2020 Sections 113-114
- e-Shram portal (30+ crore registered)
- Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Act 2023
- Spain's Riders Law 2021
- ILO 2024 platform-work resolution
- Urban Company women workforce data
- Aadhaar-UPI infrastructure for instant pay
- Hindi: 'gig arthavyavastha mein swatantrata aur nyaay'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023
- Karnataka Gig Workers (Conditions of Service and Welfare) Bill 2024
- Spain Riders Law (Real Decreto-Ley 9/2021)
- e-Shram portal (launched August 2021)
- Code on Social Security 2020
- IFAT (Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers)
- NITI Aayog 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy' (June 2022)

MODEL ANSWER

A delivery rider in Bengaluru opens an app on his phone at seven in the morning, declines a low-paying order, accepts a higher one, accepts seventeen more, logs out at eleven at night, and earns Rs 600 on a good day, Rs 350 on a bad one. He is called a 'partner', not an employee. He carries no pension, no provident-fund passbook, no employee-state-insurance card, no leave entitlement, no minimum-wage guarantee, no overtime cap, no collective-bargaining right. NITI Aayog's policy paper of 27 June 2022, *India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy*, projected that India's gig and platform workforce will rise to 23.5 million by 2029-30 from 7.7 million in 2020-21, accounting for 4.1 per cent of total livelihoods. **The platform economy has democratised work but algorithmised dignity. The freedom it offers is real; the fairness it owes is overdue.**

Begin with what is genuinely new about the gig promise. Flexible hours allow a homemaker in Kanpur to work part-time without childcare disruption; Urban Company reports that 65 per cent of its workforce of beauticians, plumbers, and electricians is women, a participation rate exceeding the All-India female labour-force participation rate of 37 per cent (PLFS 2022-23). The entry barrier is low: a smartphone, a driving licence, a vehicle, and a bank account suffice. UPI's instant-payout architecture, launched in April 2016, makes daily wage settlement technically trivial; tier-two and tier-three cities, from Bhubaneswar to Surat to Coimbatore, have seen platform-work explosion because of the same UPI-Aadhaar-DigiLocker rails. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade recorded over 1.27 lakh recognised startups by 2024, making India the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, much of it scaffolded on platform work.

The gap between promise and protection is, however, structural. The Code on Social Security of 2020, one of four labour codes consolidating 29 Acts, explicitly recognises

‘gig worker’ (Section 2(35)) and ‘platform worker’ (Section 2(60)) for the first time in Indian law. Sections 113 to 114 mandate the Central Government to frame schemes for life and disability cover, accident insurance, health and maternity benefits, old-age protection, and creche facilities. The Section 141 provision requires platforms to contribute between 1 and 2 per cent of turnover, capped at 5 per cent of payments made to gig workers, into a Social Security Fund. As of mid-2026, the operative Rules are still being finalised; the Fund is not yet collecting contributions at meaningful scale. The four labour codes themselves remain unimplemented because of state-level consultation delays.

The e-Shram portal, launched on 26 August 2021 by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, has registered over 30 crore unorganised workers, of whom roughly 1.27 crore are gig and platform workers. The portal generates a Universal Account Number; the corresponding entitlement architecture, however, has lagged. PM-SYM (Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhan Yojana) offers a Rs 3,000-per-month pension after age 60 with contributory model, but uptake has been thin. The Group Personal Accident Insurance for gig workers, announced in 2024, offers Rs 2 lakh coverage but limited beyond accident. The disconnect between registration and entitlement is what one might call *outreach without ownership*.

State governments have begun to fill the vacuum. The Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, passed on 27 July 2023, was India’s first state-level statute for the sector. It establishes a Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Board, mandates a Welfare Cess on platform companies of 1 to 2 per cent of payment to gig workers, and provides for unique identification, grievance redressal, and welfare schemes covering health, accident, and education. The Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill, 2024, expands on the Rajasthan model with explicit provisions for fair contracting, deactivation procedure, and algorithmic transparency. The Telangana state assembly has signalled similar legislation.

Federalism is once again doing the work that the Union Government has been slow to complete.

The international comparison is instructive. Spain’s Ley Rider of 11 May 2021 presumed delivery riders to be employees and required platforms to share algorithmic details with worker representatives. The EU’s Platform Work Directive of 14 March 2024 establishes a rebuttable presumption of employment for platform workers and obligates transparency on automated decisions. The UK Supreme Court ruling in *Uber BV v Aslam* in 2021 held Uber drivers to be ‘workers’ entitled to minimum wage and paid leave. California’s Proposition 22 took the opposite route. The ILO’s 2024

Resolution on decent work in the platform economy calls for floor-loading social protection regardless of employment classification.

The algorithmic dimension deserves separate attention. A single low rating, often from circumstances beyond the worker's control, can lead to deactivation without recourse. IFAT, TGPWU, and the All India Gig Workers' Union have documented livelihoods lost for cancellation rates as low as 2 per cent. Surge pricing and route-optimisation algorithms are proprietary; the worker is the object of decisions she cannot inspect. The Karnataka Bill's mandate that platforms disclose rating and deactivation parameters in plain language is a precedent worth nationalising.

A counter-argument from the platforms is that full employment status would collapse their cost structure. Ola and Uber have claimed in court that employee classification would raise costs by 40 per cent. The argument is partly true and largely false. The binary, employee or independent contractor, is itself the problem; modern platform work is a third category. Portable benefits, sectoral welfare boards funded by platform-turnover levies, minimum-rate floors set by tripartite consultation, and deactivation due-process norms preserve flexibility while floor-loading dignity. Rajasthan and Karnataka show that the binary is a rhetorical convenience, not a regulatory necessity.

What might full implementation look like? The Code on Social Security 2020 Rules should be notified with the Social Security Fund operationalised with quarterly audits. The e-Shram portal should be linked to entitlements through an Aadhaar-linked welfare card with portable benefits. A national Platform Worker Welfare Board, modelled on Construction Workers' Welfare Boards under the BOCW Act 1996, should be constituted. The Bureau of Indian Standards should issue a Code of Practice for Platform Work Algorithms requiring transparency, appealability, and bias audit.

Minimum hourly earnings should be set by sector through tripartite mechanism. The DPDP Act 2023 should be read to grant gig workers a right to algorithmic explanation.

The deeper civilisational question is what kind of country we wish to be when one in eight working Indians, by 2030, will be a gig worker. Ambedkar's Preamble promised 'social, economic and political' justice. Articles 39, 41, and 42 instruct the State to secure livelihood, work, and humane conditions. **The gig worker who carries a republic's food on his back in 42 degrees of Delhi summer deserves more than a five-star rating.** The Indian opportunity is to show the world a third-way model: platform freedom plus institutional fairness, neither European rigidity nor Californian dilution. The architecture is being built in Rajasthan, in Karnataka, in Telangana, and in the Code on Social Security. The next decade must complete it.

SOURCES

- Gig Workers in India: Code on Social Security & Their Rights
- Gig Economy in India: Prospects and Challenges (UPSC Economy)
- Are gig workers a part of India's labour data?

platform economy

Code on Social Security 2020

e-Shram

algorithmic management

portable benefits

sectoral welfare board

social security floor

Riders Law

Q51

The wealth of a nation is the wellbeing of its weakest

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

HARD

DEVELOPMENT, INEQUALITY AND WELFARE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Adam Smith opened ‘The Wealth of Nations’ (1776) with a meditation on the division of labour; Amartya Sen in ‘Development as Freedom’ (1999) reopened the question by asking whose freedom and whose labour. India crossed the USD 4 trillion GDP mark in 2024 — the world’s fifth-largest economy. Yet Oxfam’s 2023 ‘Survival of the Richest’ report found India’s top 1% own 40.5% of national wealth. Thesis: a republic’s true wealth is not its GDP; it is its ‘last citizen’ — the antyodaya measure Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, Mahatma Gandhi, and Amartya Sen converge upon.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Conceptual base. Aristotle’s ‘eudaimonia’; Gandhi’s Talisman; Rawls’ ‘difference principle’; Sen’s capabilities approach; Mahbub ul Haq’s HDI; Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness; the OECD Better Life Index. India’s NITI Aayog Multidimensional Poverty Index (released 2023) showed 24.82 crore Indians escaped poverty in 9 years — still leaves 14.96% multidimensionally poor.

Argument 2 (~200w): Indian welfare architecture. NFSA 2013 covers 81.35 crore people. PMGKAY extended till 2028. MGNREGA — a legal guarantee since 2005, employed 6.49 crore households in 2023-24. PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat) covers 55 crore. Jal Jeevan Mission — 78% rural households with tap water by 2024 (from 17% in 2019). Each is a dent, none is a cure.

Argument 3 (~200w): The remaining shadows. Tribal undernutrition (POSHAN tracker data); women’s labour-force participation 37% (PLFS 2022-23); informal-sector vulnerability; urban homelessness (1.77 million per Census 2011). Aspirational Districts Programme covers 112 districts; Aspirational Blocks Programme launched 2023. PVTG focus through PM-JANMAN (2023-24).

Counter-view (~150w): Critics call welfarism the 'revdi culture'. But empirical evidence — IMF, RBI, NITI Aayog — shows MGNREGA was a counter-cyclical buffer in 2008 and 2020. Subsidy reform via DBT saved Rs 3.48 lakh crore by FY24 (Ministry of Finance). The argument is not whether to fund the floor, but how to design it.

Conclusion (~100w): Gandhi: 'Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him.' A republic which counts its weakest first is a republic that grows last but lasts longest.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Adam Smith and Amartya Sen as bookends
- Oxfam 'Survival of the Richest' 2023 (top 1% own 40.5%)
- NITI Aayog MPI 2023 — 24.82 crore escaped poverty
- NFSA 2013 — 81.35 crore beneficiaries
- MGNREGA — 6.49 crore households in 2023-24
- PM-JAY (Ayushman Bharat) — 55 crore
- Jal Jeevan Mission tap water progress 17% to 78%
- Aspirational Districts and Blocks Programmes
- Gandhi's Talisman
- Hindi: 'rashtra ki sampatti uske antim vyakti ki khushhali'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Mahatma Gandhi's Talisman
- Amartya Sen, 'Development as Freedom' (1999)
- MGNREGA enacted 2005
- NFSA enacted September 2013
- Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY launched September 2018
- Jal Jeevan Mission launched August 2019
- PM-JANMAN scheme (2023-24)
- Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Commission

MODEL ANSWER

In 1776, in Edinburgh, Adam Smith opened *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* with a meditation on a pin factory. Division of labour, he argued, was the engine of prosperity. Two and a quarter centuries later, in 1999, Amartya Sen,

sitting in Cambridge and Calcutta, opened *Development as Freedom* by reopening the question Smith had left half-asked: whose labour, whose freedom, and for whose flourishing? The two books bracket the modern conversation about wealth. In November 2024, India crossed the USD 4 trillion GDP mark, the world's fifth-largest economy, projected by IMF and Morgan Stanley to be third by 2027. The same month, Oxfam's *Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, released in January 2023, found that India's top 1 per cent owned 40.5 per cent of national wealth; the bottom 50 per cent owned 3 per cent. **A republic's true wealth is not its GDP; it is the wellbeing of its 'last citizen', the antyodaya measure on which Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, Mahatma Gandhi, and Amartya Sen unexpectedly converge.**

The conceptual lineage runs across continents and centuries. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, named the goal of human life *eudaimonia*, flourishing, not pleasure. Gandhi's Talisman, written in August 1947, instructs every policymaker to recall the face of the poorest and weakest person they have ever seen and to ask whether the contemplated step will be of any use to him. John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971 articulated the 'difference principle': inequalities are justified only if they work to the maximal benefit of the least advantaged. Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, developed across *Inequality Reexamined* in 1992 and *The Idea of Justice* in 2009, shifted the metric from income to substantive freedoms. Mahbub ul Haq, the Pakistani economist, distilled the same insight into the Human Development Index, introduced in UNDP's first Human Development Report of 1990. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness, the OECD's Better Life Index, and the World Bank's 2018 Human Capital Index are all branches of the same tree.

India has built a recognisable welfare architecture for the last citizen, and its scale is, in some respects, without precedent. The National Food Security Act of 5 July 2013 covers 81.35 crore Indians under the PDS and PM-POSHAN, the world's largest food-security commitment. PMGKAY, launched on 26 March 2020 in the first week of the national lockdown, was extended through January 2028 and merged with NFSA to provide free rations to its beneficiary universe. MGNREGA, enacted on 2 February 2005 as a legal guarantee of 100 days of unskilled wage employment per rural household, employed 6.49 crore households in 2023-24 and generated 309 crore person-days. Ayushman Bharat-PM-JAY, launched on 23 September 2018, provides Rs 5 lakh per family per year of cashless secondary and tertiary care; by mid-2024 it covered approximately 55 crore people and had funded over 7.5 crore hospital admissions across 28,000 empanelled hospitals. The Jal Jeevan Mission has raised

rural tap-water connections from 17 per cent in 2019 to 78 per cent by 2024, providing functional household connections to over 15 crore homes.

The NITI Aayog Multidimensional Poverty Index of 2023 found that 24.82 crore Indians escaped multidimensional poverty in nine years; the headcount fell from 24.85 per cent to 14.96 per cent. The methodology is internationally credible, and the achievement represents the largest single-decade poverty reduction in human history.

The remaining shadows are equally real. POSHAN tracker data found under-five stunting at 35.7 per cent and wasting at 19.3 per cent. Female labour-force participation stood at 37 per cent (PLFS 2022-23). Informal-sector employment accounts for roughly 90 per cent of the workforce. The Aspirational Districts Programme of 2018 covers 112 districts; the Aspirational Blocks Programme of 2023 covers 500 blocks; PM-JANMAN of 2023 targets 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups with Rs 24,104 crore. Each programme is a dent; none is a cure.

The consumption Gini for India in 2021 stood at 0.357, modest internationally, but the wealth Gini was 0.832 (Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report 2022), among the highest in major economies. Most Indian wealth sits in land, gold, and real estate, untaxed in the way income is. Inheritance has been untaxed since 1985, when the Estate Duty Act was repealed. **India has built one of the world's most ambitious welfare floors alongside one of the world's most concentrated wealth ceilings.**

An honest counter-argument runs that welfare is the 'revdi culture' that saps the exchequer. The objection is empirically inverted. MGNREGA was a counter-cyclical buffer during the 2008 crisis and the 2020 lockdown; without it, distress migration would have been far more severe. Direct Benefit Transfer, expanded since 2014 to over 500 schemes, has saved Rs 3.48 lakh crore by FY24. The IMF, World Bank, OECD, and RBI converge on the view that targeted welfare is fiscally productive in India's inequality profile.

What might full implementation look like? The 16th Finance Commission, reporting by October 2025, should weigh multidimensional poverty in its horizontal devolution formula. The Social Security Code 2020 needs operationalisation for the 38 crore uncovered informal workers, with portable benefits linked to Aadhaar. The Aspirational Districts Programme should scale to all 766 districts with district-level performance contracts. The Right to Health, recognised in *Sukdeb Saha v State of Andhra Pradesh* in 2024, deserves statutory codification. A wealth-tax, recommended by the Vijay Kelkar Committee of 2003 and re-recommended by the World Inequality Lab in 2024, deserves serious parliamentary debate; even a 2 per cent levy above Rs 10

crore net worth could yield Rs 4 lakh crore annually. The PMGKAY extension to 2028 should be reviewed against MPI trajectories with sunset clauses linked to verifiable outcomes. NFSA coverage, calibrated on 2011 Census population, urgently needs updating to the 2026 enumeration.

The deeper question is moral. Mahatma Gandhi's *Talisman* asks the policymaker to recall the face of the poorest person she has seen. Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's 1965 lectures on Integral Humanism named the same principle *antyodaya*. Amartya Sen, in *The Idea of Justice*, asks how the decision affects the least-positioned. Gandhi, Upadhyaya, Sen converge on the same constitutional substance.

The republic at seventy-six has more wealth than at any prior point in its history, and the architecture to direct it. **A republic which counts its weakest first is a republic that grows last but lasts longest.** Adam Smith's pin factory and MGNREGA's rural workshop must share one balance sheet. Wealth, in 2026 as in 1776, is finally measured not by pins produced but by citizens for whom production means a fuller life. India has begun; the journey is, by its nature, never finished. To keep walking it, *antyodaya* by *antyodaya*, is the founding work of every generation.

SOURCES

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- Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs): 75 PVTGs, PM-JANMAN, and the Dhebar Commission Story

antyodaya

MPI

capabilities approach

MGNREGA

PM-JAY

Aspirational Districts

difference principle

DBT

Gini coefficient

Jan Dhan

Q52

The gig economy is freedom in the morning and fragility by night

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

GIG WORK, PLATFORM LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the image of a Zomato delivery partner at 11 pm in a Bengaluru drizzle — choosing his own hours and yet unable to refuse the next ping. NITI Aayog's 2022 report projects 23.5 million gig workers by 2029-30. Thesis: the gig economy presents itself as freedom (no boss, no fixed clock, no factory floor) but delivers fragility (no insurance, no leave, no bargaining). A modern republic must legislate the fragility while preserving the freedom.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The scale. 8.5 million gig workers today, projected 23.5 million by 2030 (NITI Aayog 2022). Platform workers: Ola, Uber, Swiggy, Urban Company, Amazon Flex. Average monthly earning ₹15,000-25,000 with 10-14 hour work-days (Fairwork India Ratings 2024).

Argument 2 (~200w): Legal scaffolding. Code on Social Security 2020 (Sections 113-114) recognises gig and platform workers; rules notified by Karnataka (2024) and Rajasthan (Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Act 2023). e-Shram portal — 30 crore registrations. The Tamil Nadu 2024 ordinance modelling Rajasthan.

Argument 3 (~200w): Global comparisons. UK Supreme Court *Uber v Aslam* (2021); EU Platform Work Directive 2024 (presumption of employment); California AB5 (2019) and Proposition 22 (2020). Spain's Riders' Law 2021. India's path: contributory tripartite welfare boards with platform-fee model.

Counter-view (~150w): Heavy regulation can kill the flexibility that workers themselves value. CIIE.CO 2023 survey: 76% of gig workers cite flexibility as primary draw. The challenge is portable benefits, not fixed employment.

Conclusion (~100w): Karl Polanyi in 'The Great Transformation' (1944) warned that labour as commodity destroys society. The 21st-century version is labour as a swipe. Freedom in the morning must not become fragility by night. A welfare state that does not see the gig worker has lost its sight.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- NITI Aayog 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy' (2022)
- Code on Social Security 2020, Sections 113-114
- Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers Welfare Act 2023
- Karnataka Platform Workers Bill 2024
- e-Shram portal — 30 crore registrations
- EU Platform Work Directive 2024
- UK SC *Uber v Aslam* (2021)
- California AB5 and Prop 22 (2019, 2020)
- Hindi: 'gig arthavyavastha din mein swatantrata, raat mein asuraksha hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023
- Karnataka Platform-Based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill 2024
- Code on Social Security 2020

- Uber BV v Aslam, UKSC 2021
- California AB5 (2019)
- EU Platform Work Directive, March 2024

MODEL ANSWER

At eleven o'clock on a wet Bengaluru night in October 2025, a Zomato delivery partner waits outside an apartment gate. The drizzle has slowed. He has been on his bike for nine hours. He chose his shift, he chose his hours, he can log off whenever he wishes — and he cannot afford to. The next ping promises ninety rupees plus a tip. Logging off costs the rating that determines tomorrow's pings. A NITI Aayog report of June 2022 projects that India's gig and platform workforce will grow from 8.5 million in 2021 to 23.5 million by 2029-30. The gig economy presents itself as freedom — no boss, no clock, no factory floor — and delivers fragility — no insurance, no leave, no bargaining. A modern republic must legislate the fragility while preserving the freedom. Few labour-market puzzles in India today carry higher stakes.

The scale is already national. Ola and Uber together operate over 1.5 million cabs and autos; Swiggy and Zomato together have more than 6 lakh active riders; Urban Company has trained 50,000 service partners; Amazon Flex, Dunzo and Porter add hundreds of thousands more. Average monthly earnings range from 15,000 to 25,000 rupees with 10 to 14 hour working days, according to the Fairwork India 2024 ratings, which scored most Indian platforms low on fair pay, fair conditions and fair representation. Behind these numbers is a clear demographic: young men aged 19 to 35, often first-generation urban migrants, increasingly women in beauty and home services, almost all without conventional access to provident fund, ESIC or pension. The Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24 records that 86 per cent of India's workforce remains informal, of which platform work is one of the fastest-growing segments.

The legal scaffolding has begun. India's **Code on Social Security 2020**, in Sections 113 and 114, formally recognises 'gig worker' and 'platform worker' as legal categories — a definitional victory in itself. The Code envisages a National Social Security Board for gig workers and a contributory welfare fund. Rajasthan's **Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act 2023**, the first state-level statute, levies a one-to-two per cent transaction fee on aggregator-customer transactions to fund a worker welfare board, with automatic registration through Aadhaar. Karnataka's similar Bill of 2024 has begun pilot implementation. The e-Shram portal, launched in August 2021, now has over 30 crore registrations across unorganised workers, providing a baseline registry that can be linked with social-protection schemes. Tamil

Nadu's 2024 ordinance modelled on Rajasthan adds another state to the map. The architecture is appearing, brick by brick, even if the bricks have not yet been laid uniformly across the country.

Global lessons inform the Indian path. The United Kingdom Supreme Court in *Uber BV v Aslam* (19 February 2021) ruled that Uber drivers are 'workers', not independent contractors — entitled to minimum wage, paid leave and pension. The European Union Platform Work Directive of March 2024 introduces a rebuttable presumption of employment when platforms exercise control over price, conduct and rejection rights. California's AB5 of 2019 attempted similar reclassification; Proposition 22 of November 2020 partly reversed it for ride-hail and delivery. Spain's Riders' Law of 2021 directly classified delivery riders as employees. South Korea's Trade Union Act amendment of 2021 extended collective-bargaining rights to dependent contractors. The lesson across jurisdictions is that one-size-fits-all rules struggle; tailored rules combining platform contributions with portable benefits work better than blanket reclassification.

India's contribution to the global debate is the model of contributory tripartite welfare boards funded by a small platform-aggregator fee, with benefits portable across platforms and states through Aadhaar-linked accounts. This sidesteps the binary of employee-versus-contractor and focuses on the worker's needs: accident cover, life insurance, maternity benefit, retirement saving, skill upgrade, grievance redress. The Rajasthan welfare board has, in its first year, disbursed accident-claim payouts within 30 days — slower than gold-standard insurance but faster than no insurance at all. The Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers and the All India Gig Workers Union have begun the slow work of collective representation, often informally and across platform boundaries. Court cases challenging the contractor classification — including a 2025 Karnataka High Court petition on behalf of Ola drivers — push the legal question further.

There is a serious counter-view. Heavy regulation can kill the flexibility that workers themselves cite as their primary draw. A 2023 survey by CII.CO at IIM Ahmedabad found that 76 per cent of gig workers ranked flexible hours as their most-valued attribute. Bringing platform work fully under conventional labour codes — with mandatory shifts, minimum-hour guarantees and limited gig opportunities — risks turning a part-time earner into an unemployed person. The challenge is portable, contributory benefits, not coerced employment. That distinction matters because freedom, when honestly chosen, is not something to legislate away. The Indian small-

shopkeeper, the freelance designer, the home-tutor — each has long lived with this kind of autonomy without state coercion to choose a formal employer.

The deeper challenges are algorithmic and asymmetric. Platforms control the ratings, the matching algorithms, the price-setting, the deactivation rules and the data. The worker has visibility into none of these. The European Union Directive's transparency provisions, requiring platforms to disclose algorithmic decision-making, are a useful template. Indian regulators are beginning to look at similar disclosure norms under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 and the proposed Digital India Act. Without algorithmic transparency, even contributory welfare boards address symptoms rather than the underlying imbalance of information and decision-making power.

Karl Polanyi, in *The Great Transformation* (1944), warned that treating labour as a commodity destroys both labour and the society around it. The twenty-first-century version of that warning is labour as a swipe — a thumb on a screen, a status changed from 'available' to 'busy'. The swipe is more efficient than the time-card it replaces, and more lonely. The platform owns the algorithm; the worker owns the bike. The algorithm has a roof; the bike has rain. **Freedom in the morning must not become fragility by night.** A welfare state that does not see the gig worker has lost its sight. The state that builds welfare into the platform, before fragility hardens into resentment, will be the one that gets digital labour right — without losing the openness that made digital labour possible in the first place. The next decade will determine whether India invents the answer or imports it.

SOURCES

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- Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Alkire-Foster Method, NITI Aayog MPI
- NITI Aayog, 'India's Booming Gig and Platform Economy' (June 2022)

gig worker

platform labour

e-Shram

Code on Social Security

Rajasthan Gig Workers Act

platform fee

AB5

Fairwork

Q53

Artificial intelligence will not replace creativity; it will exhibit our laziness

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

AI, CREATIVITY AND HUMAN WORK

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Picasso: ‘Computers are useless. They can only give you answers.’ Seven decades later, GPT-5 can write a sonnet but cannot decide whether the sonnet should be written. AI is the mirror in which our intellectual habits — depth or shallowness, courage or imitation — appear at scale. Thesis: AI will not abolish human creativity. It will exhibit, painfully and publicly, what counts as creativity and what was always mere repetition.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): What AI cannot do. Original problem-formulation (the right question, not the answer); contextual judgment under value-conflict; embodied empathy. Margaret Boden’s three creativities (combinational, exploratory, transformational) — AI excels at the first, struggles with the third.

Argument 2 (~200w): India’s creative economy. The Indian Copyright Act 1957 read with the 2024 ANI v OpenAI litigation. The 2025 IndiaAI Mission’s ₹10,371 crore allocation. BHASHINI as Indic AI. The IT Rules 2025 require deepfake labelling. But the Hybrid License model proposed by MeitY 2025 seeks middle path between training-data scrape and creator royalty.

Argument 3 (~200w): Reorganising work. World Bank 2024 — 5% of Indian jobs will be displaced; 12% augmented. Education policy must shift from answer-recall to question-formation. NEP 2020’s emphasis on critical thinking is structurally aligned. The Aspirational Skill India 4.0 mission must deepen.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue AI’s pattern-recombination is creativity by another name — AlphaFold’s protein-structure predictions, AlphaGo’s move 37. The line is blurring. Yet the human task — to ask which proteins matter, which games matter, which lives matter — remains stubbornly ours.

Conclusion (~100w): R Buckminster Fuller said: ‘You never change things by fighting reality.’ The reality is that AI exhibits us back to ourselves. The republic that builds AI literacy — and AI humility — will be a republic where creativity flourishes, not flees.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Picasso on computers and answers
- Margaret Boden's three creativities
- ANI v OpenAI litigation, Delhi HC 2024-25
- IndiaAI Mission ₹10,371 crore (March 2024)

- MeitY 2025 Hybrid Licence Model for Copyright-AI
- World Bank 2024 jobs-AI study
- NEP 2020 critical thinking emphasis
- AlphaFold and AlphaGo achievements
- Hindi: 'AI rachanaatmakta nahin chheen sakti, hamaari shaithilya zaahir karegi'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- ANI v OpenAI, Delhi High Court, 2024-25
- IndiaAI Mission, approved 7 March 2024
- BHASHINI multilingual AI stack
- AlphaFold (DeepMind, 2020-2024)
- Margaret Boden, 'The Creative Mind' (1990, revised 2004)
- IT Intermediary Guidelines Amendment Rules 2025

MODEL ANSWER

Pablo Picasso once dismissed computers in a sentence that has aged better than the machines he was rejecting. 'Computers,' he said in a 1968 interview with William Fifield, 'are useless. They can only give you answers.' Seven decades later, GPT-5 can write a sonnet to specification and BHASHINI can translate it into 22 Indian languages within a second. What no system has yet learnt is whether the sonnet should be written, for whom, and why. Artificial intelligence is the mirror in which the intellectual habits of a society — its depth or shallowness, its courage or its imitation — appear at scale. AI will not abolish human creativity. It will exhibit, painfully and publicly, what counts as creativity and what was always mere repetition. The mirror is unsparing, which is why it is useful.

The cognitive scientist Margaret Boden, in *The Creative Mind* (1990, revised 2004), distinguished three kinds of creativity. The first is combinational — pairing familiar ideas in unfamiliar ways. The second is exploratory — searching the edges of an existing conceptual space. The third is transformational — breaking the space itself and inventing a new one. Today's large language models excel at the first, are competent at the second, and remain weak at the third. They can re-arrange known forms with statistical sophistication; they cannot decide that the form itself needs changing. Original problem-formulation, contextual judgment under value-conflict, embodied empathy — these are the territories where humans still ask the questions before machines compute the answers. The poet who decides that a sonnet's volta should now appear in line nine rather than line eight is doing something that requires

a lived sense of how meaning unfolds in time, a sense models can simulate statistically but not feel.

India's creative economy is being reshaped under these pressures. The *ANI v OpenAI* litigation, filed in the Delhi High Court in November 2024, became a landmark test of whether copyrighted news content can be ingested to train commercial language models. The case is pending; its outcome will guide the entire Indic-content licensing regime. The IndiaAI Mission, approved on 7 March 2024 with an allocation of 10,371 crore rupees over five years, aims to build sovereign compute, datasets and skilling. BHASHINI has become the world's most ambitious public Indic-language stack. The IT Intermediary Guidelines Amendment Rules of October 2025 require labelling of synthetic content. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's 2025 consultation paper on a Hybrid Licence Model proposes a middle path between unrestricted training-data scrape and absolute creator royalty — a model that other developing economies are watching. AIRAWAT, the public AI supercomputer at C-DAC Pune, provides indigenous compute capacity that breaks dependence on hyperscaler-only training infrastructure.

Work itself is being reorganised. A World Bank study of 2024 estimated that around 5 per cent of jobs in India will be displaced by AI by 2030, while 12 per cent will be augmented. The implication is not catastrophic unemployment but a structural shift in the mix of human work toward the parts machines cannot do well: framing problems, defining values, building trust, choosing among ethically loaded options. Education must move from answer-recall to question-formation. The National Education Policy 2020 already emphasises critical thinking, conceptual understanding and inter-disciplinarity; its implementation through the Aspirational Skill India 4.0 mission will determine whether a generation of Indian students learns to use AI well or merely to use AI. The Atal Tinkering Labs in 10,000 schools, the National Initiative for Developing and Harnessing Innovations, and the proposed AI Centres of Excellence in agriculture, health and sustainability are all small pieces of the right infrastructure. The harder problem is teacher preparation — most Indian teachers themselves did not learn to formulate questions during their own schooling.

The counter-view is sharper than it appears. AI's pattern-recombination, sceptics argue, is creativity by another name. DeepMind's AlphaFold has predicted the structure of over 200 million proteins, a feat no human researcher could have matched. AlphaGo's 'move 37' in its 2016 match against Lee Sedol was a play no human grandmaster had considered. The 2023 Stable Diffusion image generators produce paintings that critics cannot distinguish from human work without metadata.

If creativity is producing previously unseen valuable outputs, AI is creative. The line, the argument runs, is blurring.

The line is blurring, but it is not the line that matters most. AlphaFold's predictions are valuable because biologists asked the question 'how do proteins fold?' for sixty years. AlphaGo's brilliance is brilliance within a game humans invented. The human task — to ask which proteins matter for which disease, which game matters for which culture, which life matters at this moment — remains stubbornly ours. AI is becoming an extraordinary collaborator in answering chosen questions. The choosing remains a human act, and the laziness of leaving the choosing to the machine is exactly what AI exhibits when it is allowed to. A student who submits an AI-drafted essay she does not understand has not been replaced by AI; she has been exposed by it. A lawyer who files a brief with hallucinated citations is not careless because of AI; AI has only made his shortcut visible.

The Indian creative tradition has resources for this moment. The bhakti poets — Kabir, Mirabai, Tukaram — produced verse rooted in lived experience that no algorithm can simulate honestly because the algorithm has no life to begin with. Premchand's stories drew their power from a moral imagination shaped by particular villages and particular hungers. Satyajit Ray's cinema worked through the slow attention of a director who watched faces. These are not merely cultural products; they are demonstrations of what creativity has always been — perception, courage, and the willingness to be specific. AI can assist these processes; it cannot originate them, because origination requires being a particular person in a particular world.

R Buckminster Fuller's working principle was that 'you never change things by fighting reality'. The reality is that AI is here, and it exhibits us back to ourselves. The student who uses ChatGPT to write an essay she does not understand is not lazy because of AI; AI has only shown her habit. The lawyer who files a brief with hallucinated citations is not careless because of AI; AI has only made his shortcut visible. The republic that builds AI literacy — and AI humility — alongside AI capability will be a republic where creativity flourishes, not flees. **The mirror is honest. The discipline is to look into it.** India's quietly stated bet, across NEP 2020, IndiaAI Mission and BHASHINI, is that this republic will look — and re-learn, at scale, the difference between asking and answering. The civilisations that learn the difference will use AI to extend their creativity; those that do not will use AI to exhibit their decline.

SOURCES

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- Copyright and Artificial Intelligence in 2026: Hybrid License Model, ANI vs OpenAI, and India's IP Pivot
- AIRAWAT AI Supercomputer: India's Fastest AI Compute Platform Explained

Generative AI

IndiaAI Mission

ANI v OpenAI

BHASHINI

creativity

Hybrid Licence

AlphaFold

human-AI collaboration

Q54

Growth without meaning becomes a treadmill the rich also cannot leave

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

GDP, WELL-BEING AND THE MEANING OF PROGRESS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Robert F Kennedy at the University of Kansas (1968): 'GNP measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.'

India is the world's 5th largest economy, projected 3rd by 2027 (IMF). Yet the World Happiness Report 2025 ranks India 118th, below Pakistan and Nepal. Thesis: growth without meaning becomes a hedonic treadmill — even the rich cannot dismount. A republic must measure not only how fast it runs but where it is running to.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The diagnostics. Easterlin Paradox (1974) — beyond ~\$15,000 per capita, happiness decouples from income. Daniel Kahneman's emotional well-being plateau at ~\$75,000. India's UAPA arrests, lynching deaths, mental-health epidemic point to anomie.

Argument 2 (~200w): Alternative indices. Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (since 1972); New Zealand's Wellbeing Budget (since 2019); India's HDI rank (134 of 193, 2024); UNDP Multidimensional Poverty Index showing 415 million Indians exit MPI between 2005-21. NSO Time Use Survey 2024 of unpaid care work.

Argument 3 (~200w): Civilisational reframing. The Indian purusarthas — dharma, artha, kama, moksha — refuse mono-dimensional growth. Tagore's 'Crisis in Civilization' (1941). Gandhi's Hind Swaraj critique of industrialism. The Sarvodaya tradition; Schumacher's 'Buddhist Economics' (1973). NITI Aayog's 'Holistic Progress Card' for schools (2024) — small but symbolic.

Counter-view (~150w): For 400 million still in absolute poverty, growth IS meaning — clean water, antibiotics, electricity. Donald Lal warned that growth-scepticism is a luxury of the satisfied. Yes; but the goal is not anti-growth — it is growth that knows what it is for.

Conclusion (~100w): The Bhagavad Gita 3.21: ‘Whatever the great person does, that the lesser will follow.’ A 5-trillion-dollar economy is a means. Its end is whether the daughter of a Jharkhand miner can dream beyond survival. Meaning is the missing column in our spreadsheets.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- RFK Kansas speech, 18 March 1968
- Easterlin Paradox (1974)
- Kahneman well-being plateau study (2010)
- Bhutan's Gross National Happiness since 1972
- New Zealand Wellbeing Budget 2019
- HDI 2024 rank (134/193)
- Indian MPI exit data 2005-21
- Schumacher's 'Buddhist Economics' (1973)
- Hindi: 'arth ke saath dharma na ho to vikas mrigtrishna hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Bhutan Gross National Happiness Index, 1972
- New Zealand Wellbeing Budget 2019
- UNDP Human Development Index 2024
- UNDP Multidimensional Poverty Index 2024
- NITI Aayog Holistic Progress Card, 2024
- World Happiness Report 2025

MODEL ANSWER

Robert F Kennedy stood at the University of Kansas on 18 March 1968 and said what every economist of the era had been trained to overlook. ‘Gross National Product,’ he observed, ‘measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.’ Six decades later, India is the world’s fifth-largest economy, projected to overtake Germany and Japan by 2027 to become the third (IMF, 2024). And yet the World Happiness Report 2025 placed India 118th out of 143 countries, below Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. The Gross Domestic Product line ascends; the well-being line stays flat or descends. Growth without meaning becomes a hedonic treadmill — a machine on which even the rich run faster without arriving. A republic must measure not only how fast it is running but where it is running to. The destination question turns out to

be harder than the speed question, which is why most institutions answer the easier one.

The diagnostics are old. The Easterlin Paradox, formulated by economist Richard Easterlin in 1974, observed that beyond a certain threshold of per-capita income — around 15,000 dollars in today's terms — additional income produces diminishing happiness returns. Daniel Kahneman and Angus Deaton's 2010 Princeton study found that emotional well-being plateaus around 75,000 dollars of annual household income in the United States. In India, the empirical story is muddier — extreme poverty still depresses well-being absolutely, and a billion people are still below middle-income thresholds. But the symptoms of meaningless growth are already visible in the same data: rising rates of clinical depression among urban youth (Lancet Psychiatry 2024), increasing suicides among coaching-class students in Kota, declining marriage and fertility rates in metropolitan areas, and a quiet epidemic of loneliness across age groups. The National Mental Health Survey of NIMHANS in 2016, updated in 2023, estimated that nearly 150 million Indians need mental-health intervention; only a small fraction receive it.

Alternative indices have been suggested for decades. Bhutan announced its Gross National Happiness framework in 1972, measuring nine domains including ecological diversity, time use and psychological well-being. New Zealand's Wellbeing Budget, introduced in 2019 by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, requires budget allocations to be justified against five well-being priorities. Iceland and Wales have established well-being-of-future-generations laws. India's Human Development Index rank of 134 out of 193 in the 2024 UNDP report, alongside the United Nations Multidimensional Poverty Index showing that 415 million Indians exited multidimensional poverty between 2005-06 and 2019-21, presents a mixed picture: gains in material conditions, but persistent gaps in education, mental health and ecological well-being. The National Statistical Office's Time Use Survey 2024 quantified unpaid care work for the first time — and what was previously invisible to the GDP showed up as a vast economy of women's labour without market price. NITI Aayog's SDG India Index, updated annually, tracks composite progress across 17 goals, providing a more rounded picture than GDP growth alone.

India's own intellectual traditions refuse mono-dimensional measurement. The classical *purushartha* framework — *dharma* (duty), *artha* (material prosperity), *kama* (pleasure), *moksha* (liberation) — explicitly placed prosperity as one of four legitimate human pursuits, not as the master variable to which others are subordinated. Rabindranath Tagore's 1941 essay *Crisis in Civilization*, written days before his death,

denounced the mechanisation of life that Western modernity had brought. Mahatma Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* of 1909 was a sustained critique of industrialism that treated production as its own end. Vinoba Bhave's Sarvodaya tradition extended this through bhoodan and gramdan. The German economist E F Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful* of 1973, including its chapter on 'Buddhist Economics', argued that the purpose of economics is to maximise well-being with minimum consumption — the inverse of conventional growth maximisation. NITI Aayog's Holistic Progress Card for schools, piloted in 2024, takes a small but symbolic step in this direction: a child's progress is measured beyond marks. Amartya Sen's capability approach, developed across his career and crystallised in *Development as Freedom* (1999), offers a rigorous framework for thinking about growth as expansion of substantive freedoms rather than mere income.

A serious counter-view must be heard. For the 400 million Indians still in absolute poverty, growth is meaning — clean water, antibiotics, working electricity, escape from caste indignity, escape from gender violence. The development economist Deepak Lal warned in 1983 that growth-scepticism is a luxury of the satisfied. He was not wrong about the warning, even if he was wrong about its target. The case for growth in India is not the case for hedonic infinity; it is the case for material decency. The goal is not anti-growth — that abdication would betray the poor most. The goal is growth that knows what it is for: clean water before private jets, mental health before luxury cars, dignity before vanity. Growth is not the enemy; growth without orientation is. Liberalisation since 1991 has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty; the question is what the next phase optimises for.

The institutional task is to redesign measurement and budgeting around well-being domains: health (physical and mental), education (substantive learning rather than enrolment alone), environment (air, water, biodiversity), time (leisure, family, sleep), inequality (gini, wealth concentration), and meaningful work. The United Nations Statistical Commission's 2025 framework on Beyond GDP indicators provides one template. India's Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, Periodic Labour Force Survey, NFHS-6 and India Energy Outlook 2024 together generate the data that a well-being budget could draw on. The Karnataka government's experiment with Mahalaxmi guarantees, the Kerala model of social-spending-first development, and the Telangana Rythu Bandhu cash-transfer reflect different attempts to balance growth with human development.

The civilisational reframing matters because measurement shapes behaviour. What a republic counts, it cultivates; what it does not count, it allows to atrophy. If a child's

screen-time replaces playground time and no one tallies the difference, the playground disappears. If urban tree cover declines and no Smart City scorecard penalises the decline, the tree cover continues to fall. If unpaid care work — overwhelmingly performed by women — never appears in GDP, gender inequity gets entrenched in the very arithmetic of progress.

The Bhagavad Gita 3.21 offers an old line that has not aged. ‘Whatever the great person does, that the lesser will follow.’ A 5-trillion-dollar economy is a means. Its end is whether the daughter of a Jharkhand iron-ore miner can dream beyond mere survival, whether her father retires without crippling debt, whether her mother is treated for chronic anaemia, whether the river that runs past their village is still drinkable. Meaning is the missing column in the spreadsheets, and adding it does not require abandoning the spreadsheets. It requires asking, at every budget cycle and every policy review, the question RFK posed in Kansas: what is all this growth for, and is the answer one the republic can defend in public? **A treadmill no one can step off is not freedom. A direction worth pursuing — that is.**

SOURCES

- Human Development Index (HDI): UNDP Framework, India's Rank, IHDI, GDI and MPI Family
- Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Alkire-Foster Method, NITI Aayog MPI, and India's Progress
- Global Hunger Index (GHI): Indicators, India's Rank, and the Government Critique

Easterlin Paradox

GNH

Wellbeing Budget

HDI

MPI

purusarthas

anomie

Buddhist economics

Q55

Data sovereignty is the freedom of the 21st-century citizen

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

DATA SOVEREIGNTY, DIGITAL PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND RIGHTS

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with Justice K S Puttaswamy v Union of India (24 August 2017) — privacy declared a fundamental right under Articles 14, 19, 21. Six years later, the DPDP Act 2023 set the architecture; in 2025, the Draft DPDP Rules clarified consent managers, age verification and the Data Protection Board. Thesis: data sovereignty — over the individual’s data, the nation’s data layers, and the global rules of data flow — is the new dimension of citizen freedom. A republic that does not control its data layers is, partially, governed from elsewhere.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Individual sovereignty. DPDP Act 2023 — purpose limitation, consent (Section 6), right to access/correction/erasure, Data Protection Board.

India's DigiLocker, ABDM, Aadhaar-e-KYC as user-controlled rails. Section 17 sectoral exemptions.

Argument 2 (~200w): Sectoral sovereignty. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI): UPI processing 17 billion+ transactions per month (NPCI March 2025); ONDC for commerce; OCEN for credit; AgriStack; Account Aggregator framework. The DPI Stack as world's most exported open digital scaffold.

Argument 3 (~200w): Global sovereignty. India's data-localisation debates (RBI 2018 payments-data circular); 2024-25 negotiations at WTO Joint Statement Initiative on e-commerce; the BRICS Cross-Border Data Framework proposal; the EU's GDPR adequacy assessment. Submarine cable security as data sovereignty.

Counter-view (~150w): Excessive data-localisation balkanises the internet and raises cost; small economies cannot afford parallel cloud infrastructure. The balance must be risk-based — sensitive personal data localised, business data interoperable.

Conclusion (~100w): Justice D Y Chandrachud in Puttaswamy: 'Privacy is the constitutional core of human dignity.' Data sovereignty is dignity at scale. The 21st-century citizen is free only to the extent that her data is hers, her nation's stack is sovereign, and her global voice in data norms is heard.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- Puttaswamy v Union of India (24 August 2017)
- DPDP Act 2023
- Draft DPDP Rules 2025
- DPI stack — UPI, ONDC, OCEN, AgriStack, AA
- RBI 2018 payments-data localisation circular
- GDPR adequacy assessment
- WTO JSI on e-commerce 2024-25
- DigiLocker, ABDM
- Hindi: 'data praabhuta 21vi sadi ki nagrik swatantrata hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Justice K S Puttaswamy v Union of India (24 August 2017)
- DPDP Act 2023
- UPI — 17 billion+ monthly transactions, March 2025
- ONDC, launched April 2022
- Account Aggregator framework (RBI 2021)

- RBI Storage of Payment System Data circular, 6 April 2018

MODEL ANSWER

On 24 August 2017, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court of India in *Justice K S Puttaswamy v Union of India* unanimously declared the right to privacy a fundamental right, flowing through Articles 14, 19 and 21. The judgment ran to over 500 pages. Its consequences are still unfolding. Six years later, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 set the architecture; the Draft DPDP Rules of January 2025 clarified consent managers, age verification and the Data Protection Board. But these statutes belong to a larger frame. Data sovereignty — over the individual's data, the nation's data layers, and the global rules of cross-border data flow — is the freedom of the 21st-century citizen. A republic that does not control its data layers is, partially, governed from elsewhere. To be free in the digital era is to be sovereign at three nested scales.

The first scale is individual. The DPDP Act 2023 embeds purpose limitation, data minimisation, the principle of notice and consent (Section 6), and the rights of the data principal — access, correction, erasure, grievance redress. The Data Protection Board, once fully operational, will adjudicate breaches and impose penalties up to 250 crore rupees. Children's data receives enhanced protection through age-verification and parental-consent requirements. India's existing rails strengthen individual sovereignty in practice: DigiLocker hosts over 600 crore documents owned by the citizen; the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission gives every Indian a 14-digit health ID under user control; Aadhaar e-KYC enables consent-based identity verification without surrendering the underlying document. Section 17 of the DPDP Act provides for sectoral exemptions, which civil society watches carefully — exemptions, broad enough, can swallow the rule. The proposed Consent Manager framework under Section 7, modelled on Account Aggregators, will let citizens grant and revoke granular permissions through a single interface.

The second scale is sectoral and infrastructural. India's Digital Public Infrastructure has become the world's most-exported open digital scaffold. The Unified Payments Interface processed over 17 billion transactions in a single month in March 2025, a global record; it now interoperates with payment systems in Singapore, the UAE, France, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. The Open Network for Digital Commerce, launched in April 2022, breaks the closed-app model of e-commerce by separating buyers, sellers and logistics on open protocols. The Open Credit Enablement Network democratises lending decisions. The Account Aggregator framework, launched by the RBI in 2021, lets users share financial data across institutions with explicit consent — 90 crore

consent-enabled accounts as of mid-2025. AgriStack maps farmer data for crop insurance, credit and advisory. The Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, the National Logistics Portal and the e-Vidhan initiative add further layers. The DPI Stack is exported actively — to Trinidad and Tobago, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Mongolia, Morocco and most recently Papua New Guinea under the India Stack diplomacy. Each export is a node of sectoral sovereignty for a developing economy that would otherwise depend on closed foreign platforms.

The third scale is global. India's data-localisation debates began with the Reserve Bank of India's circular of 6 April 2018 requiring storage of payment system data within India. The Srikrishna Committee's draft Personal Data Protection Bill 2018 proposed broader localisation; the 2019 Bill softened it; the DPDP Act 2023 takes a flexibility approach — the central government may by notification specify countries to which transfers are restricted. At the World Trade Organization, the Joint Statement Initiative on e-commerce continues to negotiate cross-border data flow rules; India has been a careful participant, balancing trade liberalisation against policy space. The BRICS Cross-Border Data Framework proposal of 2024 attempts an alternative to United States-led free-flow norms and Chinese localisation maximalism. The European Union's GDPR adequacy assessment for India remains pending — an external recognition that data-protection law is comparable. The 2025 strategic concern is submarine cable security: 95 per cent of intercontinental data traffic flows through under-sea cables vulnerable to physical and digital attack. The Indian government's 2024 Telecommunications Act and the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre have begun addressing this dimension.

A serious counter-view must be heard. Excessive data-localisation balkanises the internet and raises costs, particularly for smaller economies that cannot afford parallel cloud infrastructure. An Indian software firm serving European clients needs to move data; a global pharmaceutical company running trials in three continents must aggregate findings. The balance must be risk-based: highly sensitive personal data (health, biometrics, children's data) localised; business and operational data interoperable under strong contractual safeguards. Crude maximalism in either direction — full localisation or full free-flow — fails on its own terms. The European Union's Schrems II ruling of 2020 demonstrated that even within the developed world, cross-border data flow regimes can collapse under privacy scrutiny.

The architecture must respect what the underlying right actually is. Justice D Y Chandrachud, writing the lead opinion in Puttaswamy, located privacy not in a single article but in a constellation: 'Privacy is the constitutional core of human dignity.'

Dignity is what the citizen possesses at the centre, not at the State's pleasure. Data is the digital silhouette of personhood. To be in command of one's data is, in 2026, what it once was to be in command of one's body, one's home, one's vote. To be in command of one's national data stack is what it once was for a republic to be in command of its coinage. To be heard in global data-norms is what it once was to be a peer at international treaty tables.

The state itself must be a data-sovereign actor, not merely a data-localisation regulator. Indigenous email platforms for sensitive communication, NIC cloud infrastructure for ministries, BOSS for government computing and Bhashini-powered Indic interfaces reduce dependence on foreign-controlled stacks. The Defence Communication Network and Air Force Net represent the security-sovereignty version of the same principle.

The civil-society dimension is equally important. The Internet Freedom Foundation, the Centre for Internet and Society, the Software Freedom Law Centre and the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy together provide the technical and legal capacity to scrutinise data legislation in real time. Citizens who understand their data rights are the foundation on which DPDP enforcement will ultimately rest. The Data Protection Board can adjudicate complaints only if complaints are filed; complaints will be filed only if citizens recognise violations.

The implication is clear and demanding. The 21st-century citizen is free only to the extent that her personal data is hers under enforceable law, her nation's digital stack is sovereign and open, and her global voice in data-rule negotiations is heard. The three scales reinforce one another. Strong national DPI gives citizens better individual control; strong individual rights make national DPI legitimate; strong global engagement defends both from external rule-making. India's particular contribution to the world's data politics — open public infrastructure with privacy-respecting law and active multilateral participation — is, on its better days, a coherent model. The republic that follows the model fully will be one whose citizens carry their freedoms not only in their hands but also in their bytes. **Data sovereignty is dignity, at scale and at speed.**

SOURCES

- DPDP Act 2023: Digital Personal Data Protection, Consent Manager and the Data Protection Board
- BHASHINI: India's AI-Powered Multilingual Language Stack
- Personal Liberty under Article 21 — Maneka Gandhi to Puttaswamy

DPDP Act

DPI

UPI

ONDC

AgriStack

data localisation

Puttaswamy

consent manager

Q56

Financialisation of life turns citizens into spreadsheets

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

FINANCIALISATION, DEBT AND THE MORAL ECONOMY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with David Graeber's 'Debt: The First 5,000 Years' (2011) — finance preceded money, and finance is older than markets. Today an Indian student takes an education loan to buy a degree to take a home loan to buy a flat to take a personal loan to buy a wedding to take a credit card to buy groceries. Thesis: when every relationship — schooling, marriage, healthcare, friendship, retirement — gets priced as an asset class, citizens become spreadsheets. The republic loses meaning that does not fit in a cell.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): The scale. Indian household debt 38% of GDP (RBI 2024) — doubled in a decade. Unsecured personal loans grew 25% YoY in FY 2024-25. EdTech defaults; BNPL exposure; gold-loan boom. The 2024 Hindenburg saga and SEBI's Adani investigation.

Argument 2 (~200w): The cultural shift. Health-insurance premiums tied to step-count (Apollo Munich-Vitality, 2017+); credit-scoring of CIBIL determining marriages; matrimonial sites listing salary; school-rankings as ROI. The 2025 IRDAI directive on dynamic premiums.

Argument 3 (~200w): Institutional pushback. RBI's Financial Stability Reports flagging unsecured-loan stress; SEBI's circulars on F&O retail losses (CY24 — 76% of retail F&O traders lost money); the IBC 2016 codifying corporate insolvency as moral closure; PMJDY-DBT prevents financial exclusion.

Counter-view (~150w): Without financialisation, India would not have UPI, microfinance, or capital for MSMEs. The challenge is the form, not the fact, of financial inclusion. Yashasvi Yojana and JAM trinity democratised access.

Conclusion (~100w): Karl Polanyi distinguished embedded markets from disembedded ones. A republic that lets every life-event become a financial product disembeds itself from its own values. The poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz wrote, 'Aur bhi gham hain zamane mein mohabbat ke siva' — there are griefs beyond love. So too there are values beyond price.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- David Graeber, 'Debt: The First 5,000 Years' (2011)
- RBI household debt 38% of GDP (2024)
- SEBI F&O retail-loss data CY 2024
- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016
- IRDAI dynamic-premium directive 2025
- PMJDY-DBT for financial inclusion
- Karl Polanyi's 'embedded' markets
- Hindenburg-Adani 2023 sequence
- Hindi: 'jeevan ka vittiyakaran nagrikon ko spreadsheet bana deta hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- David Graeber, 'Debt: The First 5,000 Years' (2011)
- Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016
- SEBI Study on F&O Retail Trading, 24 September 2024
- RBI Financial Stability Report June 2024
- Apollo Munich Vitality (since 2017)
- Hindenburg-Adani saga, January 2023

MODEL ANSWER

David Graeber's *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011) opens with a quiet historical correction. Finance, he argues, did not arise from barter; finance predates money, and credit predates markets. Mesopotamian temple-records of agricultural debt are older than coinage. Today, the Indian middle-class student takes an education loan to buy a degree, to qualify for a job, to take a home loan, to buy a flat, to take a personal loan, to fund a wedding, to take a credit card, to buy groceries. Each life-event becomes a financial product. When every relationship — schooling, marriage, healthcare, friendship, retirement, even step-counting — gets priced as an asset class, citizens become spreadsheets. The republic loses the meaning that does not fit in a cell.

The scale of Indian financialisation is now substantial. Household debt stood at 38 per cent of GDP in 2024, according to the Reserve Bank of India's Financial Stability Report of June 2024 — roughly doubled in a decade. Unsecured personal loans grew at 25 per cent year-on-year in FY 2024-25, prompting an RBI risk-weight increase in November 2023. The Buy Now Pay Later sector, largely unregulated until 2024, exposed lakhs of young consumers to short-tenor high-interest debt. Gold loans

crossed 8 lakh crore rupees in outstanding portfolio. The EdTech sector's defaults, beginning with BYJU's troubles in 2023, demonstrated how easily an education-loan ecosystem can collapse into financial distress. The Hindenburg-Adani sequence of January 2023 — and SEBI's ongoing investigations — illustrated how financialisation of corporate India intersects with retail investor outcomes. The total Demat accounts in India crossed 17 crore in 2024, more than tripling in five years, with much of the growth coming from young first-time investors.

The cultural shift is more subtle and more pervasive. Health insurance premiums are now tied, by several large insurers, to step-counts read from wearables (Apollo Munich's Vitality programme, launched in 2017, is the pioneer). The IRDAI directive of 2025 on dynamic premiums codifies the practice. Credit scoring of CIBIL determines not only loan eligibility but increasingly matrimonial prospects, with some matrimonial sites listing salary and credit score alongside age and education. School rankings are evaluated as return on investment by parents whose children have not yet learnt to read. Even friendship is monetised through influencer economies that convert relationships into engagement metrics that convert into advertising rates. The boundary between life and ledger is dissolving. The 2024 NASSCOM report estimated that the Indian influencer economy is worth over 3,000 crore rupees and growing at 25 per cent annually, with relationships explicitly priced as 'audience engagement assets'.

Institutional pushback has begun but remains uneven. The Reserve Bank of India's Financial Stability Reports have repeatedly flagged unsecured-loan stress; the November 2023 risk-weight increase on personal loans and credit cards was a corrective. SEBI's study of futures and options trading, released on 24 September 2024, found that 76 per cent of retail traders in F&O lost money in CY 2024, with average annual losses of 2 lakh rupees per retail trader. The aggregate loss was nearly 1.8 lakh crore rupees — wealth that moved from households to algorithmic counterparties. The study triggered margin reforms and option-strike-price restrictions. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016, India's most ambitious creditor-debtor reform, codified corporate insolvency as moral closure — a structured way to bury what could not be revived. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana and the Direct Benefit Transfer architecture, through the JAM trinity, have democratised access to formal finance — a counter-balance to predatory exclusion that should not be lost in the critique. The RBI's December 2024 norms on digital lending apps, requiring registered NBFC backing for every lending app, brought the wild-west of fin-tech micro-credit into a regulatory perimeter.

A serious counter-view must be heard. Without financialisation, India would not have UPI, which has banked the previously unbanked. It would not have micro-finance, which has lent to women's groups across rural India. It would not have the bond and equity markets that finance MSME working capital and mega-infrastructure simultaneously. The Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana has disbursed over 47 lakh crore rupees in micro-loans since 2015. The Atal Pension Yojana and the National Pension System bring retirement security to crores who never had it. The challenge is the form, not the fact, of financial inclusion. The discipline is to draw the line between empowering credit and enslaving debt. The Self-Help Group movement, which has lifted millions of rural women into financial autonomy through groups linked to banks under NABARD's SHG-Bank linkage programme since 1992, demonstrates that financial access need not be financialisation in the Polanyian sense.

Karl Polanyi, in *The Great Transformation* (1944), distinguished embedded markets from disembedded ones. In embedded markets, economic exchange is one institution among many, governed by social and ethical norms. In disembedded markets, economic exchange becomes the master institution to which family, faith, education and politics are subordinated. Polanyi's prediction — that disembedded markets eventually generate a counter-movement of regulation and social protection — has played out repeatedly: in the New Deal of 1933, in the European post-war welfare state, in India's banking nationalisation of 1969, in the IBC of 2016. The pattern is structural. Markets that escape ethical embedding are eventually re-embedded, either through reasoned reform or through populist convulsion.

The behavioural dimension matters. Kahneman and Thaler showed that humans systematically err in financial decisions — over-confidence, loss aversion, present bias. Indian retail investors who entered F&O in 2021-23 exhibited textbook patterns of these biases.

The Indian task is to choose reasoned reform. Regulate predatory lending. Strengthen financial literacy at school level. Cap unsecured-loan exposure as a share of household income. Provide age-stratified guard-rails on retail derivatives. Require transparent pricing of dynamic insurance premiums. Above all, recognise that not every life-event needs to become a financial product — some relationships must remain unpriced. The classical balance among *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* contains the argument: *artha* is one of four legitimate pursuits, never their master.

The poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz wrote, *aur bhi gham hain zamane mein mohabbat ke siva* — there are griefs in the world beyond the grief of love. So too there are values beyond

price, dignities beyond debit, lives beyond ledger. A republic that lets every life-event become a financial product disembeds itself from its own values, and a disembedded republic is a republic that has forgotten what it is for. **Financialisation is a powerful servant and a tyrannical master. The discipline is to keep it in service.** The line between servant and master is drawn, daily, in regulation, in classroom curricula, in family conversations, in policy choices. Drawn well, it lets finance fund the development the country needs. Drawn badly, it lets finance own the country it should have funded.

SOURCES

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financialisation

IBC

BNPL

F&O retail loss

Polanyi

household debt

IRDAI

PMJDY

Q57

Quantum technology is the next sovereignty

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

QUANTUM TECHNOLOGY, POST-QUANTUM CRYPTOGRAPHY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the announcement of Microsoft's Majorana 1 chip (February 2025), Google's Willow chip (December 2024), and IBM's Heron processor — the quantum advantage is not 'when' but 'how soon'. India's National Quantum Mission (April 2023) commits ₹6,003 crore over eight years. Thesis: quantum computing will not just break RSA encryption; it will rewrite the perimeter of national sovereignty — over data, defence, finance and pharmaceuticals. Nations that arrive late will be unfree by default.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): What changes. Shor's algorithm (1994) breaking RSA in polynomial time; Grover's quadratic speedup on search; quantum sensing (sub-marine detection without sonar); quantum simulation for materials. NIST PQC standards (FIPS 203, 204, 205 — finalised August 2024).

Argument 2 (~200w): India's stance. National Quantum Mission 2023; four T-Hubs at IISc, IITM, IITD, IITB; ISRO-NQM space-quantum collaboration; ₹730 crore equipment grants 2024. Indian start-ups: QNu Labs, BosonQ Psi, QPiAI.

Argument 3 (~200w): Sovereignty dimensions. ‘Harvest now, decrypt later’ threat to current encrypted traffic; CERT-In 2024 PQC migration roadmap; SBI and RBI quantum-safe pilot 2025; Armed Forces’ Project Chakshu for quantum-secure comms. Equity question: who will train the 25,000 quantum engineers India needs by 2030?

Counter-view (~150w): Critics call quantum a 20-year horizon; near-term focus should be AI, semiconductors. Yet PQC migration must begin a decade before the threat materialises (NIST timeline). Strategic patience demands strategic preparation.

Conclusion (~100w): Vikram Sarabhai dreamt of an India that arrived early in space; the next Sarabhai-moment is quantum. To be sovereign in 2040 means to have built quantum capability — and its ethical guard-rails — in 2026.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- National Quantum Mission, 19 April 2023
- ₹6,003 crore over 8 years
- Four T-Hubs at IISc, IIT-M, IIT-D, IIT-B
- NIST FIPS 203/204/205 PQC standards (August 2024)
- Microsoft Majorana 1 chip (February 2025)
- Google Willow chip (December 2024)
- Shor’s algorithm (1994)
- Project Chakshu — quantum-secure comms
- Hindi: ‘quantum praudyogiki agla rashtra-praabhutva hai’

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- National Quantum Mission, 19 April 2023
- Microsoft Majorana 1 quantum chip, February 2025
- Google Willow chip, December 2024
- NIST PQC FIPS 203/204/205 standards, August 2024
- QNu Labs, Bengaluru
- ISRO satellite-based quantum-key distribution

MODEL ANSWER

In February 2025, Microsoft announced Majorana 1, a topological-qubit chip that the company claimed represented a path to one million qubits on a single processor. In December 2024, Google’s Willow chip demonstrated quantum error correction below threshold for the first time. IBM’s Heron processor, IIT Bombay’s experimental

superconducting qubits, China's Jiuzhang photonic computer — the global quantum race is no longer a question of whether but of when, and the when is shorter than most policy timetables had assumed. India's National Quantum Mission, approved on 19 April 2023, commits 6,003 crore rupees over eight years to building sovereign quantum capability. Quantum computing will not just break current encryption; it will rewrite the perimeter of national sovereignty over data, defence, finance and pharmaceuticals. Nations that arrive late will be unfree by default. Quantum technology is the next sovereignty.

What changes with quantum is mathematical and concrete. Peter Shor's algorithm of 1994 demonstrated that a sufficiently large quantum computer could break RSA encryption — the foundation of most current internet security — in polynomial time, where classical computers require exponential time. Grover's algorithm of 1996 offers a quadratic speedup on unstructured search problems. Quantum sensing enables submarine detection without sonar, gravity mapping of underground structures, and atomic-clock precision navigation independent of GPS. Quantum simulation models chemical reactions and material properties at scales classical computers cannot reach, accelerating drug discovery, battery design and materials engineering. The National Institute of Standards and Technology of the United States finalised Post-Quantum Cryptography standards (FIPS 203, 204 and 205) in August 2024 — the first standardised replacements for RSA-era encryption. ML-KEM for key encapsulation and ML-DSA for digital signatures form the new baseline algorithms.

India's stance has moved from aspiration to architecture. The National Quantum Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in April 2023, established four Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs): at the Indian Institute of Science Bengaluru for quantum computing, IIT Madras for quantum communication, IIT Bombay for quantum sensing and metrology, and IIT Delhi for quantum materials and devices. The mission targets intermediate-scale quantum computers of 50-100 qubits in five years, 1000 qubits in eight years; satellite-based quantum-key distribution over 2,000 kilometres; magnetometers and atomic clocks; and a domestic quantum-materials supply chain. Initial equipment grants of 730 crore rupees were disbursed in 2024. The Indian Space Research Organisation has begun ground-station preparation for satellite-quantum-key-distribution experiments. Domestic start-ups — QNu Labs in Bengaluru, BosonQ Psi in Bhilai, QPiAI — are building commercial quantum products. The Indian Army's Project Chakshu is developing quantum-secure communications for defence applications. The C-DOT's quantum communication research and the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research's experimental work add depth to the ecosystem.

The sovereignty dimensions are layered. The ‘harvest now, decrypt later’ threat means adversaries can be collecting encrypted Indian government, financial and corporate communications today, with the intent to decrypt them once quantum capability matures. CERT-In published its Post-Quantum Cryptography migration roadmap in 2024, beginning with critical infrastructure sectors. The State Bank of India and the Reserve Bank of India launched a quantum-safe cryptography pilot in 2025, testing PQC algorithms in real banking traffic. The Defence Research and Development Organisation has been working on quantum-secure communications since 2021. The Unique Identification Authority of India’s Aadhaar database, the Income Tax Department’s transaction records, the Election Commission’s electronic systems, the National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre’s protected facilities — each will need PQC migration within the next decade. The cost of doing this badly is not theoretical; it is national.

Equally significant is the equity dimension: India will need an estimated 25,000 quantum-trained engineers and scientists by 2030, and the current pipeline produces a fraction of that. The National Mission’s skilling component, executed through IISc, the IITs and the National Institute of Technology system, must accelerate dramatically. The Atal Tinkering Labs, the NIIT Foundation’s quantum-curriculum pilots, and the international fellowships at the Perimeter Institute and the Max Planck Institutes for Indian students all contribute, but the scale must grow ten-fold over the next five years. Without trained workforce, even the best-funded mission becomes equipment without operators.

A counter-view deserves to be stated honestly. Critics argue that quantum is a 20-year horizon technology, that fault-tolerant quantum computers capable of breaking RSA are at least a decade away, and that India’s scarce science-investment rupees should focus on near-term wins in artificial intelligence, semiconductors and biotechnology. The argument is partly correct on timeline but wrong on strategy. Post-Quantum Cryptography migration must begin a decade before the threat materialises, because cryptographic migration in a banking system, defence network or government database takes years to execute carefully. The NIST timeline explicitly assumes a migration window beginning now. Quantum communication and sensing are not 20-year horizons; they are operational today. And quantum-trained workforce, once started, takes ten to fifteen years to produce at scale. Strategic patience demands strategic preparation.

The international cooperation map is informative. The US CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 funds quantum alongside semiconductors. The EU Quantum Flagship began in

2018 with one billion euros. The UK National Quantum Strategy of 2023 commits 2.5 billion pounds. China's investment exceeds 15 billion dollars across the past decade, with operational satellite QKD (Micius, 2017) and the Jiuzhang processors. India's allocation is comparable on a per-capita basis to several European programmes but absolute investment must grow.

The ethical dimension cannot be deferred. Quantum capabilities will reshape not only encryption but also surveillance, biometrics, drug repurposing, and material weaponisation. The same quantum computer that accelerates antibiotic discovery can also accelerate development of biochemical agents. Quantum-AI combinations may amplify decision-making power in ways current governance frameworks have not contemplated. The republic that builds quantum capability without simultaneously building quantum ethics — export controls, dual-use review, public deliberation about applications — will inherit power without wisdom. The Wassenaar Arrangement on export controls and the upcoming international quantum-governance frameworks at the OECD and the UNCTAD will require Indian voice; absence from those tables is a sovereignty cost in itself.

Vikram Sarabhai's vision for the Indian Space Research Organisation, articulated in 1969, was that India should arrive in space technology not behind the world but with the world. The republic mostly fulfilled that aspiration: ISRO is today a peer in launch capability, planetary exploration and applications. The next Sarabhai-moment is quantum. To be sovereign in 2040 means to have built quantum capability — and its ethical guard-rails — in 2026. **Sovereignty in the 21st century will not be measured only in borders or budgets, but in the depth of national capability in technologies that decide who can read whose messages, design which medicines, and detect which threats.** Quantum is the new perimeter. India is building. The discipline now is to build faster, train wider, and decide more carefully.

SOURCES

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- Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC): Securing the Internet Against Quantum Computers
- UPSC 2025: Critical Minerals, Majorana 1 Quantum Chip, Rare Earths and Modern Military Explosives

Quantum Mission

PQC

Shor's algorithm

Majorana 1

Willow

QKD

Project Chakshu

T-Hub

ESSAY

Environment

3 practice questions

Q58

Climate change is the moral examination of our generation

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

EASY

CLIMATE, INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): The IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report (March 2023) declared a ‘final warning’ — the 1.5°C threshold may be breached by the early 2030s. Yet the carbon budget is not equally spent: the wealthiest 10% account for nearly half of cumulative emissions; the poorest 50% have contributed barely 12% (World Inequality Report 2022). Thesis: climate change is not a scientific problem awaiting a technical fix; it is a moral examination — a test of whether one generation can hold itself accountable to all those it has not yet met.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Intergenerational justice. John Rawls’ veil of ignorance applied to time. The Children’s Climate Case at the European Court of Human Rights (Duarte Agostinho, 2024). Vanuatu’s UN General Assembly resolution (March 2023) for an ICJ advisory opinion. *Ranjitsinh v Union of India* (SC, 2024) recognised the right to be free from adverse climate effects as part of Articles 14 and 21.

Argument 2 (~200w): Common but differentiated responsibility. UNFCCC Article 3, Paris Agreement Article 9. India’s per-capita emissions are 1.9 tCO₂; the US is 14.4 tCO₂ (Global Carbon Atlas 2023). Yet India is among the top three vulnerable countries (Germanwatch CRI 2023). Loss & Damage Fund operationalised at COP28 — still under-capitalised at 700 million dollars vs 100 billion-plus need.

Argument 3 (~200w): India’s moral leadership. India’s LT-LEDS strategy submitted at COP27 (November 2022); Net Zero by 2070; Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) launched October 2022; International Solar Alliance (with 120+ members); Green Credit Programme 2023; ethanol blending hit 12.06% in 2023.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue climate action sacrifices growth in a country where 800 million depend on PMGKAY. But the IPCC and World Bank converge: every dollar in climate adaptation saves USD 4-10 in disaster recovery. India lost an estimated USD 159 billion to extreme heat in 2022 (ILO).

Conclusion (~100w): The Atharva Veda teaches: ‘Mata Bhumi Putroham Prithivya’ — ‘The earth is my mother, I am her son.’ Climate change is the rare ethical question that admits no spectators. The exam is one we must pass together — or fail forever.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- IPCC AR6 Synthesis Report, March 2023
- World Inequality Report 2022 emission shares
- Ranjitsinh v Union of India (SC, 2024)
- Paris Agreement CBDR-RC principle
- Loss & Damage Fund at COP28
- India's LT-LEDS strategy COP27
- Mission LiFE (October 2022)
- International Solar Alliance
- Hindi: 'jalvayu parivartan hamari naitik pariksha'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Ranjitsinh v Union of India (SC March 2024)
- Duarte Agostinho v 32 European states (ECHR 2024)
- ICJ Advisory Opinion request by Vanuatu (March 2023)
- Mission LiFE launched at COP27, October 2022
- International Solar Alliance (120+ members)
- Green Credit Programme 2023
- ILO estimate of India's heat-loss (USD 159 billion, 2022)

MODEL ANSWER

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its AR6 Synthesis Report released on 20 March 2023, issued what its chair Hoesung Lee described as a ‘final warning’. The 1.5 degree Celsius threshold of the Paris Agreement is likely to be crossed in the early 2030s, on current trajectories. The carbon budget remaining for a 50 per cent chance of staying below 1.5 degrees is approximately 500 gigatonnes of CO₂. Yet that budget is not equally spent. The World Inequality Report of 2022 found that the wealthiest 10 per cent of humanity is responsible for nearly half of cumulative emissions; the poorest 50 per cent for barely 12 per cent. **Climate change is not a scientific problem awaiting a technical fix; it is a moral examination of our generation, a test of whether one cohort can hold itself accountable to all those it has not yet met.**

The framing is older than the science. John Rawls's veil of ignorance, applied across time rather than across class, asks: what climate policy would we choose if we did not know whether we would be born in 2025 or in 2125? Edmund Burke, that conservative of conservatives, wrote in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* in 1790 that society is 'a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.' The Atharva Veda, in its *Bhumi Sukta*, calls the earth 'Mata Bhumi Putroaham Prithivyah', 'the earth is my mother, I am her son.' Religion, philosophy, and constitutional theory converge on the same proposition: the present generation holds the earth in trust, not in fee simple.

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, CBDR-RC, is the legal expression of this moral intuition. UNFCCC Article 3, drafted at Rio in 1992 and reaffirmed in the Paris Agreement of 2015, recognises that historical emissions are not evenly distributed. The United States, with 4 per cent of world population, contributed 25 per cent of cumulative CO₂ emissions; the European Union added another 17 per cent. India, with 17 per cent of world population, contributed 3 per cent. India's per-capita emissions stand at 1.9 tonnes of CO₂; the United States' at 14.4 tonnes (Global Carbon Atlas 2023). And yet, by Germanwatch's Climate Risk Index 2023, India is among the top three most climate-vulnerable countries on earth, with annual losses of USD 159 billion attributable to extreme-heat impact on labour productivity alone (ILO 2022).

The legal architecture is catching up. The Loss and Damage Fund, debated since the 2007 Bali COP and resisted for fifteen years, was operationalised at COP28 in Dubai in December 2023. Its initial capitalisation of approximately USD 700 million remains symbolic against estimated need exceeding USD 100 billion annually. Vanuatu's UN General Assembly resolution of 29 March 2023, requesting an ICJ advisory opinion on the legal obligations of states to climate-vulnerable populations, was adopted by consensus. The European Court of Human Rights, in *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz v Switzerland* on 9 April 2024, held that Switzerland's failure to adopt adequate climate measures violated Article 8 of the European Convention. The Indian Supreme Court, in *M. K. Ranjitsinh v Union of India* on 21 March 2024, held that the right to be free from adverse effects of climate change is part of Articles 14 and 21.

Climate justice is no longer an aspirational phrase; it is a litigable cause of action.

India's contribution to the moral examination has been substantive. The Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategy was submitted at COP27 in November 2022, charting India's path to net-zero by 2070. The Updated NDCs of August 2022

committed to reducing emissions intensity of GDP by 45 per cent from 2005 levels and to achieving 50 per cent of installed power capacity from non-fossil sources by 2030. Mission LiFE, launched on 20 October 2022, foregrounds individual and community behaviour. The International Solar Alliance, co-founded with France in 2015, has grown to 120-plus member countries. India's installed non-fossil capacity reached 200 GW by mid-2024; the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana of February 2024 targets 1 crore rooftop installations by 2027; the Green Hydrogen Mission of January 2023 targets 5 million tonnes by 2030.

An honest counter-argument deserves a careful answer. Climate action, sceptics say, sacrifices growth in a country where 800 million depend on PMGKAY. The IPCC's AR6 Working Group II report finds that every dollar invested in adaptation saves USD 4-10 in disaster recovery. The Global Commission on Adaptation estimated USD 1.8 trillion in adaptation through 2030 would yield USD 7.1 trillion in net benefits. The choice is not between climate action and growth; it is between calibrated investment now and catastrophic damage later.

What might full implementation look like? The State Action Plans on Climate Change, prepared in 2010-12, need a second-generation update with quantified targets. The Sovereign Green Bond programme should scale toward Rs 1 lakh crore annually. Carbon-trading under the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme of June 2023 needs robust monitoring. The *Ranjitsinh* judgment must be operationalised through a Climate Adaptation Act with public-trust grounding. School curricula must teach climate literacy under NEP 2020. The 'Polluter Pays' principle must extend to corporate Scope 3 emissions through SEBI's BRSR framework.

The intergenerational nature of climate change is what makes it ethical rather than merely technical. A child born in 2026 will be 76 in 2102, living through the 2.7 degrees Celsius rise projected under current policies. The Bundelkhand household whose monsoon failed thrice in seven years knows climate change as missed wages. The Mumbai sweeper whose May shift crosses the WHO heat-stress threshold knows it as a heart palpitation. The Chamoli family buried by the 7 February 2021 Rishiganga flash flood knows it as a funeral.

Climate change is the rare ethical question that admits no spectators. **The atmosphere is the most democratic common in human history; every breath is a vote, and the vote of the future cannot be cast except by us, today.** The Bhagavad Gita's *lokasangraha*, the Atharva Veda's *Bhumi Sukta*, the Christian doctrine of stewardship, and Rawls's veil of ignorance each meet at this point. The moral

examination of our generation is therefore not whether to act but whether to act in time, at scale, with justice. India has begun. The world is watching. The next generation, whose vote we cannot count, will judge us on results, not rhetoric. The exam is one we must pass together, or fail forever.

SOURCES

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- India's LT-LEDS and Climate Strategy: Why Net-Zero by 2070 Needs a Long Horizon
- UNFCCC Explained: Kyoto Protocol, Paris Agreement, and the Road from COP 28 to COP 30

CBDR-RC

Loss & Damage

LT-LEDS

Mission LiFE

carbon budget

NDC

ISA

intergenerational equity

climate justice

Q59

Climate justice is the most generous form of patriotism

125 MARKS

1150 WORDS

85 MIN

HARD

CLIMATE JUSTICE, EQUITY AND TRANSITION

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the 2025 Mumbai monsoon flooding Bandra-Worli sealinking residents and Dharavi alike — but Dharavi has no insurance. Climate change is the rare crisis where the polluter and the victim are different people, sometimes different continents, sometimes different generations. Thesis: climate justice — equity between rich and poor nations, present and future generations, urban and rural India — is patriotism scaled to planet. To love one's country honestly is to demand fairness in the sky one shares.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): Inter-generational justice. India's 2070 net-zero target; LT-LEDS submitted at COP27 Sharm-el-Sheikh (2022); the per-capita emission gap (India 1.9 tCO₂, USA 14.4 tCO₂ — Global Carbon Budget 2024).

Argument 2 (~200w): Inter-national justice. UNFCCC's 'Common But Differentiated Responsibilities' (CBDR-RC); the \$100 billion-a-year climate finance pledge from Copenhagen 2009, unmet; the Loss and Damage Fund operationalised at COP28 (2023); CBAM (EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) coming into force 2026.

Argument 3 (~200w): Domestic justice. India's coal phase-down (vs phase-out, COP26 Glasgow language); just-transition for coal-belt districts (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh); rooftop solar and PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (2024); Mission LiFE; Green Credit Programme.

Counter-view (~150w): Some argue developing nations citing ‘climate justice’ becomes an excuse for delay. India must move beyond rhetoric to demonstrate leadership — and it has, with ISA, CDRI, LeadIT. Yet the developed-world commitment shortfall remains structural.

Conclusion (~100w): Mahatma Gandhi: ‘The earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s needs, but not every man’s greed.’ Climate justice is the application of that sentence to atmosphere, ocean and ice. Patriotism that ends at the border is shallow; patriotism that extends to grandchildren and other nations’ children is large enough for the planet.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- CBDR-RC principle, UNFCCC Article 3.1
- Loss and Damage Fund operationalised, COP28 (2023)
- India's 2070 net-zero pledge (COP26)
- Per-capita emissions gap
- CBAM coming into force 2026
- PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (15 February 2024)
- International Solar Alliance (founded 2015)
- Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (2019)
- Hindi: 'jalvayu nyay sabse uddar deshbhakti hai'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- Loss and Damage Fund, COP28 Dubai, December 2023
- India's LT-LEDS at COP27, November 2022
- PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, 15 February 2024
- International Solar Alliance, 2015
- EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, 2023 transitional
- Mission LiFE, 2022

MODEL ANSWER

The 2025 Mumbai monsoon flooded the lobbies of Bandra-Worli Sealink residents and the lanes of Dharavi alike. The water knew no income line. The recovery did. Insurance, generators, gated society redress mechanisms — these favour one side of that line. Climate change is the rare crisis in which the polluter and the victim are different people, sometimes different continents, sometimes different generations. The Indian truck that brought the diesel to the building had emitted a fraction of what an American SUV had emitted across the same decade; yet the fisherman whose nets

came up empty off the Konkan coast last winter was Indian. Climate justice is the demand that the calculus of cost and consequence be made fair. It is patriotism scaled to the planet. To love one's country honestly is to demand fairness in the sky one shares.

The first dimension of climate justice is inter-generational. The atmosphere is a stock variable; today's emissions linger for a century. India submitted its Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy at COP27 Sharm-el-Sheikh in November 2022, committing to net-zero by 2070. Critics asked why not 2050. The answer lay in arithmetic: India's per-capita emissions in 2024 were 1.9 tonnes of carbon dioxide, against the United States' 14.4 tonnes (Global Carbon Budget 2024); India still had hundreds of millions of citizens without consistent electricity access. To demand peer-equivalent decarbonisation timelines from a country whose historical responsibility is 3 per cent of cumulative emissions, while the United States carries 24 per cent, would be to ask the late-comer to pay for the early-feast. Generations not yet born will inherit the atmosphere we leave; an honest patriot owes them the same fairness she demands from her contemporaries.

The second dimension is inter-national. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change of 1992 embedded a principle that has aged with sharp relevance: 'Common But Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities'. Developed nations agreed at Copenhagen in 2009 to mobilise 100 billion dollars annually by 2020 for developing-country climate action. The OECD's 2024 progress note records that the target was met only partially and late. The Loss and Damage Fund, finally operationalised at COP28 Dubai in December 2023 after thirty years of demand, is the conceptual breakthrough — recognition that some climate impacts cannot be adapted away and demand compensation. Its initial pledges of 700 million dollars are a fraction of need but a beginning. Meanwhile, the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, transitional since October 2023 and binding from January 2026, taxes carbon-intensive imports — a measure justified as decarbonisation but read by developing countries as protectionism in green clothing. The New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance, negotiated at COP29 Baku in November 2024, set a target of 300 billion dollars annually by 2035, which India and other developing countries called inadequate by an order of magnitude.

The third dimension is domestic. India's coal-belt districts — Dhanbad, Korba, Singrauli, Talcher — house 13 million livelihoods directly or indirectly tied to coal. Net-zero by 2070 means a coal phase-down (the careful word chosen at Glasgow 2021 instead of phase-out) that must not strand workers and regions. The NITI Aayog Just

Transition Working Group, set up in 2024, is building district-level transition plans. PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, launched on 15 February 2024, aims to roof-mount solar on one crore households, redistributing energy ownership downward. The Green Credit Programme of October 2023 monetises voluntary environmental actions. Mission LiFE of October 2022 makes the citizen the unit of climate action. PM-KUSUM has solarised over 4 lakh farm pumps. Each scheme attempts to embed justice in the operational mechanics of transition, not merely in the rhetorical framing.

India's diplomatic moves have followed the same justice logic at scale. The International Solar Alliance, co-founded with France in 2015, now has over 120 member countries focusing on solar deployment across the Tropics. The Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, launched at the UN Climate Action Summit in September 2019, has 40 member nations and a particular focus on small-island developing states. The LeadIT initiative, co-led with Sweden, addresses heavy-industry decarbonisation. The Global Biofuel Alliance launched at G20 New Delhi in September 2023 builds South-South cooperation in clean fuels. The Big Cat Alliance for tiger and lion conservation, also launched in 2023, extends the climate-and-biodiversity nexus. These are not just diplomatic accessories; they translate the demand for climate justice into operational architectures the South can use without waiting for the North.

One counter-view deserves a frank answer. Sceptics in developed capitals argue that 'climate justice' has become an excuse for developing-country delay — a rhetorical shield for continued emissions. The objection is misdirected. India today is the third-largest renewable-energy investor globally, has overtaken its 2030 non-fossil capacity target ahead of schedule (50 per cent non-fossil capacity reached in 2025), and is constructing the world's largest renewable park at Khavda in Gujarat. The justice argument is not a request for free-riding; it is a request for fair sequencing. The North reduces faster because it has emitted more and has more capacity. The South builds clean while still developing. Both move; neither stalls. The cumulative-emissions data is the structural answer to the rhetorical objection.

The vulnerability map is the human reminder. Bangladesh and Maldives are existential cases — the former projected to lose 17 per cent of its land area by 2050 under one-metre sea-level rise, the latter under threat of disappearance. The Pacific Island Forum's 2024 declaration on climate-induced displacement names the issue starkly. India's Sundarbans communities, the fisherfolk of Odisha and Andhra coastline, the apple growers of Himachal Pradesh whose seasons are shifting, the Lakshadweep islanders facing coral bleaching — each is a climate-justice constituency

within India itself. The justice claim, then, is not merely a foreign-policy stance; it is a domestic obligation.

Mahatma Gandhi's familiar sentence — 'the earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed' — was published in 1947 in *Young India* as a critique of industrial appetite. Climate justice is the application of that sentence to atmosphere, ocean and ice. Patriotism that ends at the border is shallow. Patriotism that extends to grandchildren, to citizens of other nations and to the unborn, is patriotism large enough for the planetary scale of the problem. **Climate justice is the most generous form of patriotism — a love of country that recognises country sits inside a shared sky.** The republic that practices it is not weakened; it is enlarged. The republic that refuses it loses the future it claims to protect — and the planet on which the future would otherwise have been lived.

SOURCES

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climate justice

CBDR-RC

Loss and Damage Fund

CBAM

PM Surya Ghar

ISA

just transition

net zero

Q60

Energy transition must be just or it will not be permanent

125 MARKS

1100 WORDS

80 MIN

MEDIUM

ENERGY TRANSITION, JUST TRANSITION AND EQUITY

ANSWER OUTLINE

Introduction (80-120 words): Open with the 2024 Greenpeace map of India's coal heartland — Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, eastern Madhya Pradesh — where 13 million livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on coal. India added 17 GW of renewable capacity in FY 2024-25, but Coal India produced 778 million tonnes in 2024 — both records. Thesis: an energy transition that abandons workers, communities and regions cannot be permanent. Justice is not a sentimental add-on; it is the structural condition of sustainability.

Body — Argument 1 (~200w): India's target architecture. 500 GW non-fossil by 2030; 50% energy from non-fossil sources; reduction of emissions intensity 45% from 2005 levels by 2030; net-zero by 2070. PM-KUSUM, PLI for solar manufacturing, PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (Feb 2024) — 1 crore households targeted.

Argument 2 (~200w): Just-transition challenges. South Africa's \$8.5 billion JET-IP at COP26 (2021) as model. India's Just Transition Working Group (NITI Aayog 2024). Coal-belt districts: Dhanbad's 27 coal towns; Korba; Singrauli. The Asola Bhatti coal-mine closure case (2024); CIL's diversification.

Argument 3 (~200w): Beyond electrons. Green Hydrogen Mission (₹19,744 crore, January 2023); BioE3 Policy 2024; the 2025 Critical Minerals Mission; Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act 2022 enabling carbon markets. Distributed solar reshapes who owns power.

Counter-view (~150w): Hasty closures risk energy security — Europe's 2022-23 gas crisis taught the discipline of transition realism. India's 2025 base-load needs require sequenced coal-decline, not abrupt phase-out.

Conclusion (~100w): ILO's Guidelines for a Just Transition (2015): 'A just transition for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy.' India's coal worker, solar installer, mineral miner and consumer must all see themselves in the new map. Justice is the only adhesive long enough.

KEY POINTS TO INCLUDE

- India's 500 GW non-fossil by 2030 target
- PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana (15 February 2024)
- Green Hydrogen Mission, January 2023
- Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act 2022
- South Africa Just Energy Transition Partnership \$8.5 billion (2021)
- NITI Aayog Just Transition Working Group 2024
- ILO Just Transition Guidelines 2015
- Critical Minerals Mission 2025
- Hindi: 'urja parivartan tabhi tikaau jab nyaaypoorn ho'

EXAMPLES & CASE STUDIES

- PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, 2024
- Green Hydrogen Mission, January 2023
- South Africa Just Energy Transition Partnership 2021
- Coal India Ltd diversification plans
- PM-KUSUM scheme
- International Solar Alliance, 2015

MODEL ANSWER

A 2024 Greenpeace map of India's coal heartland tells a story of two arithmetics. Across Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal and eastern Madhya Pradesh, around 13 million livelihoods depend directly or indirectly on coal — miners, truckers, washery hands, railway porters, contract labour, small shopkeepers, restaurant cooks, school-fee-payers. Coal India Limited produced 778 million tonnes in 2024, a record. In the same year, India added 17 GW of renewable capacity, also a record. Both arithmetics are real. An energy transition that abandons the workers, communities and regions of the first arithmetic cannot be permanent. Justice is not a sentimental supplement to the climate calculation. It is the structural condition of sustainability. A transition that is unjust will be politically reversed before it is technically complete.

India's targets are now well known. By 2030, 500 GW of non-fossil installed capacity, 50 per cent of total energy from non-fossil sources, and a reduction of emissions intensity per unit of GDP by 45 per cent from 2005 levels — these commitments form the country's Nationally Determined Contributions submitted at COP26 Glasgow in November 2021. The longer horizon is net-zero by 2070, articulated in the Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategy at COP27 in 2022. The implementation map already covers PM-KUSUM for farm-pump solarisation, the Production-Linked Incentive scheme for solar PV manufacturing, the FAME II scheme for electric mobility, and the National Solar Mission. The PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, launched on 15 February 2024, aims to rooftop-solarise one crore households, redistributing not just generation but ownership. Solar installed capacity has crossed 90 GW; wind 47 GW; and the Khavda renewable park in Gujarat at 30 GW will be the world's largest single-location project.

Just-transition challenges form the harder track. South Africa's 8.5 billion dollar Just Energy Transition Partnership, announced at COP26 in 2021 with the European Union, United Kingdom, France, Germany and United States, became the global template — though its implementation has been bumpy. Indonesia and Vietnam followed with their own JETPs. India has declined a JETP arrangement of similar form, preferring sovereign-led financing, but established the NITI Aayog Just Transition Working Group in 2024 to build district-level transition plans for coal-belt regions. The cases are difficult: Dhanbad has 27 coal-dependent townships; Korba's electricity output runs entire states; Singrauli's mines feed thermal plants that power Delhi. Each needs not just alternative employment but alternative identity — what does a third-generation mining family do when the seam closes? The Coal India Ltd's

diversification into solar parks and aluminium-grade alumina, while welcome, requires retraining timelines longer than current planning has accommodated.

The horizon extends well beyond electrons. The National Green Hydrogen Mission, approved on 4 January 2023 with an outlay of 19,744 crore rupees, targets 5 million tonnes of green hydrogen production capacity by 2030 — for steel, fertiliser, refining and shipping. The BioE3 Policy of August 2024 places bio-manufacturing at the centre of India's circular-economy ambitions. The Critical Minerals Mission of January 2025 secures supply chains for lithium, cobalt, rare earths and other elements that the energy transition consumes voraciously. The Energy Conservation (Amendment) Act 2022 enabled the Indian Carbon Market, with compliance and offset segments — converting decarbonisation into a price signal that can shape investment. The Battery Energy Storage System obligation from FY 2024 onwards, integrating storage into renewable tenders, addresses the intermittency problem that has long haunted solar and wind.

One counter-view deserves attention. The 2022-23 European gas crisis, triggered by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, demonstrated that hasty energy transitions in the absence of robust alternatives create severe security and welfare costs. Germany returned to coal in winter 2022. The United Kingdom delayed several phase-out deadlines. The lesson is sequencing, not capitulation. India's 2025 baseload requirements still depend significantly on thermal capacity, and abrupt closures would risk grid instability that hurts the poor first. The discipline is transition realism: build renewable capacity, build storage, build transmission, train workers, retire coal in planned phases — not in panic. The 'phase-down' language adopted at Glasgow 2021 reflects this realism; phase-out is the destination, phase-down is the route.

The deeper political economy is that an energy transition without justice will face local resistance that no climate target can survive. The Hasdeo Aranya struggle in Chhattisgarh between 2023 and 2025 was not against renewable energy; it was against being treated as resource colonies for someone else's development. The protests at Sterlite Copper in Thoothukudi in 2018 were not against industrialisation; they were against pollution borne by communities who did not benefit. The just-transition challenge is, fundamentally, a question of voice: do the people most affected sit at the planning table, or merely receive the consequences? The Niyamgiri precedent of 2013, where the Supreme Court empowered gram sabhas to decide on mining in their territories, is the constitutional answer that energy planners can no longer ignore. The Forest Rights Act 2006 community-rights provisions must be honoured in transition planning, not deferred for it.

The skilling question is decisive. The Skill Council for Green Jobs estimates that India will need 3 million green-collar workers by 2030 — solar installers, wind technicians, battery storage engineers, hydrogen plant operators, EV mechanics, grid integration specialists, carbon-credit auditors. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 has begun green-skill modules; the Industrial Training Institutes are being upgraded; the National Skill Development Corporation has signed Memoranda of Understanding with solar and wind developers. But the speed of skilling is currently slower than the speed of capacity addition, which means the social adjustment will lag the technical transition. Closing this gap is not optional.

Equity within transition matters as much as equity around it. Rooftop solar that reaches only the urban middle class entrenches energy poverty in rural areas. Electric vehicles that remain affordable only to upper-income buyers slow public adoption while transferring public subsidies regressively. Carbon markets that monetise corporate decarbonisation without addressing community displacement become accounting exercises. The PM-KUSUM model — subsidising solar pumps for small and marginal farmers — and the PM Surya Ghar prioritising lower-income households are structurally important precisely because they push the transition's benefits downward.

The International Labour Organization's Guidelines for a Just Transition (2015) commit signatories to 'a just transition for all towards an environmentally sustainable economy'. The phrase 'for all' is doing most of the work. India's coal worker, solar installer, mineral miner, EV battery technician, hydrogen plant operator and electricity consumer must all see themselves in the new energy map — not as casualties of an externally imposed climate timetable but as participants in a national reinvention. Skilling, social protection, livelihood diversification, regional industrial policy, schools and clinics in transitioning districts — these are not soft accompaniments to the energy transition; they are its hard architecture. **Justice is the only adhesive long enough to hold a transition spanning five decades.** Without it, the renewable miracle of 2030 will produce the political crisis of 2040. With it, India can build the model the developing world is watching for.

SOURCES

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just transition

PM Surya Ghar

Green Hydrogen Mission

ISA

PM-KUSUM

coal phase-down

critical minerals

carbon market

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