**1. How did Covid exacerbate the vulnerabilities of some sections of the society? Explain with the help of suitable examples.**

**Approach-**

Candidates need to write about the vulnerable section in the society. And then highlight how due to the pandemic there difficulties got exacerbated with help of suitable examples.

**Introduction**

The vulnerable groups which are exposed to their vulnerabilities during COVID-19 pandemic are- Women, Children, Students, Aged, Disabled, Poor migrants, unorganised sectors workers, People living with ailments and Sexual Minorities. The COVID-19 pandemic affected these vulnerable sections of population differently.
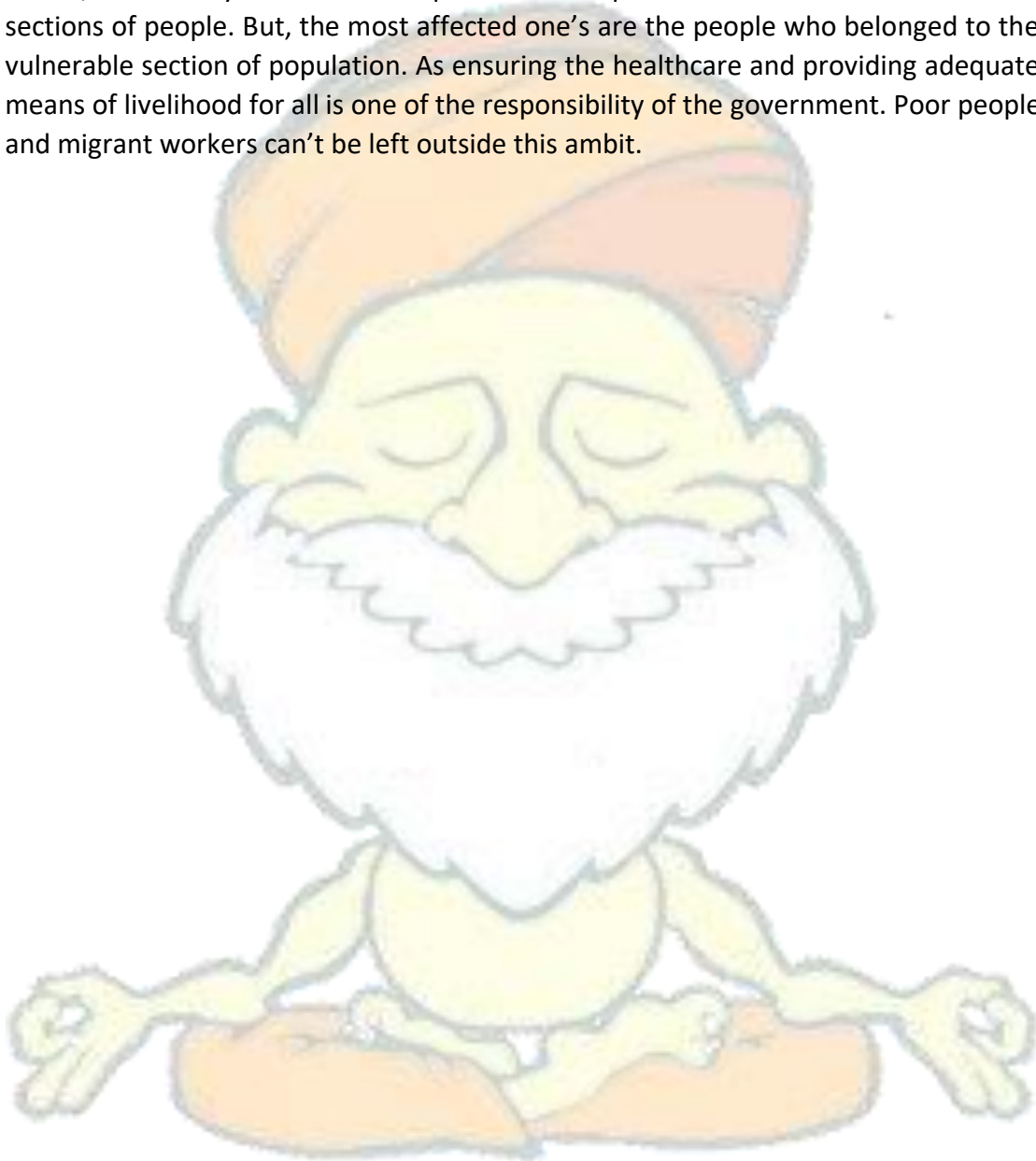
**Body**

- While children's health appears less impacted by COVID-19 than older adults, children's education are interrupted, protective structures disrupted and their families and communities placed under stress by health and economic burdens.
- COVID-19 pandemic, increased girls' and young women's duties caring for elderly and ill family members, as well as for siblings who are out of school.
- Girls, especially those from marginalised communities and with disabilities, may be particularly affected by the secondary impacts of the outbreak. It also put at women at greater risk of exploitation, child labour and gender-based violence.
- The impact on older adults is notable. According to World Health Organization (WHO) data from April 2020, more than 95% of COVID-19 deaths were among people over 60 years of age, and more than half of all deaths occurred in people of 80 years-plus.
- One of the most important problem we encountered was that the overburdened cities and containment which made migrant workers to walk for there home.
- The risk of contagious diseases was more potent urban slums these areas as residents also suffer from a lack of basic services such as safe drinking water and sanitation.
- With respect to Indian economy, It lost 124 million jobs in March and April, primarily in the informal sectors comprising small traders and wage labourers;

employment was also lower in self-owned businesses and salaried employees, too, lost jobs.

**Conclusion**

Hence, we can say that COVID-19 pandemic's impact differs in its scale in different sections of people. But, the most affected one's are the people who belonged to the vulnerable section of population. As ensuring the healthcare and providing adequate means of livelihood for all is one of the responsibility of the government. Poor people and migrant workers can't be left outside this ambit.

2. **The basket of basic necessities of the poor has expanded in the last two decades. Do you agree? Do you think the current welfare schemes reflect this transformation? Critically examine.**

**Approach**

Students are expected to write about the multiple necessities of the poor in the today's time with respect to multidimensionality of the poverty. Then highlight the few government initiatives to tackle it. Also as question demands to critically examine students should highlight the loopholes in poverty alleviation schemes.

**Introduction**

Poverty is a state or condition in which a person lacks the resources for a minimum standard of living. Traditionally, the term poverty refers to lacking enough resources to provide the basic necessities of life – food, clean water, shelter and clothing. But modern economists extend the basket of basic necessities to include access to health care, education and even transportation for example multidimensional poverty index.

**Body**

Reasons for expansion of basket of the poor:

- Economic growth does not always reduce poverty or deprivation. Several studies have found that economic growth is not strongly associated with a reduction in other deprivations, such as child malnutrition or child mortality.
- Poverty as multidimensional: Poor people describe ill-being to include poor health, nutrition, lack of adequate sanitation and clean water, social exclusion, low education, bad housing conditions, violence, shame, disempowerment and much more.
- For example, an area in which most people are deprived in education requires a different poverty reduction strategy from an area in which most people are deprived in housing conditions.

Welfare schemes reflecting the new transformed needs:

- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana:
- National Rural Urban Livelihood Mission:
- Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana:

- Integrated Child Development Program, Midday Meal scheme etc are also providing food to the needy sections like children and women.
- Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY)
- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY)

Despite such new transformed schemes is Incidence of extreme poverty:

- While a large number of poverty alleviation programmes have been initiated, they function in silos.
- There is no systematic attempt to identify people who are in poverty, determine their new transformed needs.
- The resources allocated to anti-poverty programmes are inadequate and there is a tacit understanding that targets will be curtailed according to fund availability.
- There is no method to ensure that programmes reach everybody they are meant for.
- Lack of proper implementation and right targeting of new scheme. For example due there is right to education policy with different schemes but due to digital divide and pandemic there is learning loss.
- There has been a lot of overlapping of schemes. Every year a huge number is added to the population pool of the country. This renders the scheme ineffective.

**Conclusion**

If the hurdles are addressed with effective implementation of decentralized planning and localized initiative, it can surely give positive results. We have to address the structural loopholes and build movement in masses for the inclusive growth and prosperous society.

**3. Explain the significance of regional connectivity with neighbours for India's strategic and economic interests.**

**Approach**

Candidates need to comment or give his views critically (covering both positive and negative sides) about India's policy of strategic autonomy or non-alignment being just a prettified language for ducking hard choices.

**Introduction**

From a policy of strategic insulation and neglect during much of the Cold War, and a reluctant embrace of regionalism thereafter, India's regional policy has now shifted irreversibly towards strengthening cross-border relations. Progress has been significant (reviewed ahead), and even unprecedented, including the laying of new pipelines, building electricity networks, upgrading port, rail, and airport infrastructure, and reinvigorating people-to-people exchanges.

**The significance of regional connectivity with neighbours for India's strategic and economic interests**

This sorry state of connectivity today reflects decades of geostrategic divergence, political nationalism and economic protectionism.

- The first and most important driver of the new connectivity policy is a geostrategic response to China and its unprecedented linkages across the subcontinent. Breaking into what was India's sphere of influence, Beijing has massively expanded its diplomatic, economic, and political footprint across South Asia.
- The second driver of India's connectivity policy is economic growth and the disproportionate size and centrality of its market in the region. Rising consumption levels and infrastructure modernisation are rapidly shrinking South Asia's geography. Conversely, with decreasing time and cost to trade, there are also increasing incentives to deepen cross-border economic relations.
- The third and last driver of the connectivity approach is shaped by a cultural vision that claims to reactivate India's past centrality as a civilisational power.
- Complementing the geostrategic and economic factors examined above, this "Indic" approach to connectivity has strived to activate new people-to-people contacts across the region.
- Today, the demand for regional cooperation is higher than ever and the opportunities far more meaningful than they were 10 or 20 years ago.

- India will have to make informed choices to articulate why, where, and on what terms connectivity matters in the region.
- Most importantly, an effective Indian connectivity strategy will hinge on expert knowledge, research and data on the region.
- Thanks to China there is now a growing interest in India's neighbouring countries and the neglected field of South Asian studies is experiencing a slow revival in universities, think tanks, and diplomatic and military training institutes but far more is needed.
- Sambandh, Brookings India's regional connectivity initiative, attempts to address these demands and challenges by supporting a more strategic Indian approach to enhancing regional connectivity.
- Sambandh's research strives to support policymakers and other stakeholders to sequence connectivity initiatives, identify priorities, monitor implementation, and increase effectiveness.
- The focus is on India's regional neighbourhood, the first concentric ring of the strategic mandala theory.
- India's global priorities—whether in the wider Gulf region, the Indian Ocean, or Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific—are bound to falter unless the country connects first with its immediate periphery.

**Conclusion**

Connectivity is vital. It does more than just enhance trade and prosperity. It unites a region. India has been at the crossroads for centuries. We understand the benefits of connectivity. There are many connectivity initiatives in the region. If these have to succeed, we must not only build infrastructure, we must also build bridges of trust.