

Q.1) As Artificial Intelligence becomes deeply integrated into daily life and governance, there is a growing need for a Code of Ethics to guide its use. What core ethical principles should underpin the development and deployment of AI? Justify your answer. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

As AI becomes central to decision-making in governance and public life, it raises ethical concerns related to bias, privacy, and accountability. A well-defined ethical code is vital to ensure AI serves society justly and transparently.

Body

Ethical Principles for Responsible AI

- ✓ **Transparency and Accountability:** AI systems must be explainable, and responsibility for their outcomes must rest with identifiable human actors, aligning with the principles of deontological ethics and procedural justice.
- ✓ **Human Oversight and Control:** Critical decisions involving rights, welfare, or justice must remain under human supervision to ensure empathy, discretion, and moral reasoning are preserved.
- ✓ **Fairness and Impartiality:** AI should avoid systemic bias and ensure just treatment of all individuals, supporting Rawlsian fairness and objectivity in public service.
- ✓ **Privacy by Design and by Default:** Privacy must be embedded into AI systems from the outset to protect autonomy and uphold the individual's right to dignity and data security.
- ✓ **Non-Discrimination and Inclusion:** AI must correct, not reinforce, historical inequalities, ensuring accessibility and equity for all sections of society.
- ✓ **Confidentiality and Discretion:** Systems handling sensitive data must respect confidentiality, upholding the values of integrity, trust, and professional ethics.
- ✓ **Innovation and Continuous Improvement:** Ethical AI should foster progress while continually updating safeguards to reflect evolving risks, in line with responsible innovation.
- ✓ **Security and Resilience:** Robust and tamper-proof AI systems prevent misuse, uphold public trust, and support the ethical value of probity in governance.

Conclusion

Ecuador recently became the first country to adopt an AI Code of Ethics in a public institution, setting an important global precedent. India, with its scale and diversity, must also move towards a formal ethical framework for AI.

Q.2) What are the key determinants of ethical behaviour in public service? Do these determinants vary across time and context? Explain with examples. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Ethical behaviour in public service reflects the moral compass of individuals within the framework of law, public accountability, and institutional values. It is critical to maintaining legitimacy, justice, and trust in governance.

Body

Key Determinants of Ethical Behaviour in Public Service

Ethical conduct in public service is shaped by multiple interacting factors:

- ✓ **Personal values and conscience:** Traits such as honesty, empathy, and integrity—central to virtue ethics—form the foundation of ethical behaviour, especially when rules are unclear.
- ✓ **Legal and institutional norms:** Service conduct rules, constitutional principles, and administrative laws ensure that actions are aligned with deontological duties and procedural justice.
- ✓ **Organisational environment and leadership:** A culture of ethical leadership and transparent decision-making fosters integrity and discourages corruption or moral disengagement.
- ✓ **Public expectations and accountability:** In a democracy, the demand for fairness, transparency, and responsiveness—driven by citizens, media, and oversight institutions—reinforces ethical conduct.
- ✓ **Training and ethical awareness:** Regular exposure to moral reasoning and dilemmas sharpens ethical judgment and prepares officers for real-life complexities.

Do Determinants Vary Across Time and Context?

Yes, while core values remain constant, their expression adapts:

- During a pandemic, utilitarian reasoning may justify prioritising collective welfare over procedural formality.
- In the digital era, AI systems raise new ethical issues around consent, privacy, and algorithmic bias.
- Historical shifts, such as the move from colonial loyalty to constitutional morality, also reflect this evolution.

Conclusion

Ethical behaviour is rooted in enduring principles but guided by context. A public servant must apply ethical reasoning with sensitivity to time, duty, and the public good.

Q.3) In times of war or national security threats, the accurate and responsible flow of information becomes critical. However, media often resorts to sensationalism for viewership. In this context, discuss the core principles of media ethics. Illustrate with suitable examples. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

In conflict situations, media influences public sentiment and national stability. During Operation Sindoor, circulation of unverified news exposed how misinformation can harm morale—underscoring the need for strict adherence to media ethics and accountability.

Core Principles of Media Ethics

- ✓ **Truth and Accuracy:** Media has a moral duty—aligned with deontological ethics—to report verified facts, especially during war or terrorism. Inaccurate reporting during the 2008 Mumbai attacks, for instance, was exploited by attackers to track police movements.
- ✓ **Responsibility and Public Interest:** Journalistic freedom must be balanced with national security and societal stability. Ethical media prioritises what the public *needs* to know over what attracts attention.
- ✓ **Objectivity and Fairness:** Sensational or one-sided coverage, such as unverified claims in cross-border conflicts, violates fairness and may provoke public fear or hostility—undermining communal harmony.
- ✓ **Minimising Harm:** Media must avoid content that incites panic, endangers lives, or damages reputations. This aligns with utilitarian ethics—seeking maximum good with minimum harm.
- ✓ **Accountability and Transparency:** Ethical journalism involves admitting errors, issuing clarifications, and maintaining editorial independence free from political or corporate pressures.

Conclusion

In high-risk situations, ethical media must act with restraint and accuracy. India urgently needs a clear Media Ethics Code to balance press freedom with accountability, especially during national security challenges.

Q.4) Children are often taught ideal moral values such as honesty, compassion, and fairness. Yet, the adult world frequently operates on compromise, competition, and self-interest. What explains this moral dissonance, and how can individuals ethically reconcile personal values with real-world complexities? (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Children are taught to view morality in black and white—truth is good, lying is bad. But in adult life, competing interests, systemic pressures, and incentives often blur these boundaries, leading to moral dissonance.

Body

Explaining the Dissonance

- ✓ **Over-rationalisation of wrong:** Adults justify unethical actions as 'realistic' or 'necessary.' Lying in politics is dismissed as strategy; cutting corners in governance becomes "efficient management."
- ✓ **Socialisation into moral flexibility:** As one grows, success is often rewarded more than integrity. In corporate or political life, idealism is seen as naïve.
- ✓ **Role conflict:** A civil servant may face a situation where personal empathy clashes with policy—e.g., denying flood relief to someone without documents.
- ✓ **Moral fatigue and institutional silence:** Long-term exposure to unethical systems leads to desensitisation. In the Vyapam scam, many stayed silent due to fear or disillusionment.
- ✓ **Emotional dissonance:** Adults often feel guilt but suppress it to conform. The discomfort doesn't vanish—it turns into apathy or quiet resignation.

Reconciliation of Values and Reality

- ✓ **Moral clarity through introspection:** Regular self-questioning—"Would I want my child to do this?"—can cut through the fog of rationalisation.
- ✓ **Contextual application of values:** Practical wisdom (Aristotle's *phronesis*) helps balance rigid rules with real-world demands.
- ✓ **Ethical courage and consistency:** Whistleblowers like E.A.S. Sarma or Ashok Khemka demonstrated that core values can be upheld even under pressure.
- ✓ **Institutional reinforcement:** Ethical training, accountability systems, and transparent leadership reduce value erosion.

Conclusion

Ethical erosion doesn't begin with evil intentions, but with the first compromise. The wisdom lies not in rejecting moral simplicity, but in carrying it—with discernment—into complex adult realities. Ethics, when lived with consistency, becomes not a burden but a quiet form of resistance.

Q.5) In the context of contemporary armed conflicts, how relevant are the ethical principles governing the conduct of war (Jus in Bello)? Critically examine the challenges in upholding humanitarian norms such as proportionality, distinction, and humane treatment during modern warfare. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Jus in Bello, grounded in just war theory and formalised through international humanitarian law (IHL), remains ethically indispensable, though its application faces growing challenges amid the complexities of modern warfare.

Body

Relevance of Jus in Bello Today

- ⇒ Despite the brutal nature of war, Jus in Bello remains essential to preserving basic human dignity, preventing war crimes, and maintaining international legitimacy. It sets a moral standard that differentiates just combat from barbarism, even in hostile environments.
- ⇒ **For instance, the Geneva Conventions** still serve as a benchmark for holding nations accountable in cases of civilian targeting, as seen in international responses to conflicts in Gaza, Ukraine, and Syria.

Challenges in Upholding Humanitarian Norms

- ✓ **Proportionality:** Precision weapons and drone strikes are justified as “surgical,” yet civilian casualties persist due to flawed intelligence. The 2015 Kunduz hospital bombing by NATO forces raised questions about proportional response.
- ✓ **Distinction:** Non-state actors (e.g. terrorists or insurgents) often operate from civilian areas, making it hard to distinguish combatants from civilians—blurring moral and legal lines.
- ✓ **Humane Treatment:** Detainees in Guantanamo Bay and abuses in Abu Ghraib prison reveal the erosion of humane treatment under the justification of “national security,” violating both legal and moral standards.
- ✓ **Technological Detachment:** Remote warfare (e.g., drones, AI-assisted targeting) increases emotional distance, risking desensitisation and reducing ethical scrutiny of lethal decisions.
- ✓ **Weak enforcement:** International mechanisms like the ICC lack power over powerful states or non-state actors, allowing violations without consequence.

Conclusion

Upholding humanitarian norms demands stronger international will, ethical military leadership, and greater public accountability to ensure that even in war, humanity is not lost.

Q.6) Scientific consensus on climate change is clear, yet meaningful global action remains elusive. In this context, discuss the ethical principles that must guide climate policy-making at both national and global levels. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Climate change is not just an environmental issue but a moral one—testing our responsibility to future generations, vulnerable populations, and the planet itself. Ethical principles must therefore form the core of climate policy at all levels.

Body

Ethical Principles and Corresponding Measures

- ✓ **Intergenerational Justice:** Policies must protect future generations from irreversible damage.
 - India's push for **renewable energy via the National Solar Mission** reflects this principle.
 - Globally, the **Paris Agreement's long-term temperature goals** also express concern for future humanity.
- ✓ **Common but Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR):** Based on fairness, this principle expects developed nations to lead.
 - The **Green Climate Fund**, where wealthier countries finance clean energy in the Global South, operationalises CBDR. India supports this by demanding climate justice in international forums.
- ✓ **Precautionary Principle:** Acting despite uncertainty is ethically necessary.
 - **Banning single-use plastics in India** and global agreements like the **Montreal Protocol** (for ozone protection) show precaution in action.
- ✓ **Equity and Inclusion:** Marginalised groups often suffer most.
 - India's **State Action Plans on Climate Change** emphasise resilience for vulnerable communities.
 - Similarly, **Loss and Damage funds** proposed at COP27 seek to aid nations most affected by climate change.
- ✓ **Global Solidarity:** Climate ethics demands cooperation.
 - India's **International Solar Alliance (ISA)** promotes collective clean energy goals.
 - **Technology transfer mechanisms** under the UNFCCC reflect this globally.

Conclusion

Ethical climate policy must go beyond science and economics to include fairness, responsibility, and compassion—ensuring both present and future generations inherit a liveable planet.

Q.7) Given below are three quotations by great thinkers and philosophers. What do each of these quotations convey to you in the present context?

"The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men." — Plato (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Plato cautions that when morally upright individuals disengage from civic responsibility, power gets concentrated in the hands of unethical actors. Indifference is not a passive act—it enables wrongdoing by creating a vacuum in public ethics.

Body

Positive Examples of Civic Participation:

1. **Arab Spring (2010–12):** Mass protests led to the fall of autocratic regimes, driven by citizens demanding accountability and justice.
2. **India's Independence Movement:** Ethical engagement by the masses, including non-violent resistance, changed the course of colonial history.

Indifference in Current Society:

1. **Low Electoral Participation:** Cities like Mumbai see <50% turnout, allowing unqualified or criminal candidates to win due to apathy among educated voters.
2. **Silence on Hate Speech:** Fake news and communal content on WhatsApp often go unchallenged, contributing to events like the 2020 Delhi riots.
3. **Disinterest in Local Governance:** Citizens rarely attend ward meetings or civic consultations—e.g., poor public involvement in Smart City planning across towns.
4. **Tolerating Corruption:** Everyday bribery (e.g., for licenses or permits) is accepted as "normal," reinforcing systemic scams like the 2G or coal block cases.
5. **Environmental Apathy:** Public response to issues like Aarey forest clearance or Delhi's air pollution is often reactive, not sustained or widespread.
6. **Echo Chambers on Social Media:** Users avoid confronting misinformation or hate, letting partisan narratives dominate during critical times like elections.
7. **Neglect of Civic Duties:** Tax evasion, traffic rule violations, and non-reporting of misconduct reflect daily indifference to ethical citizenship.

Conclusion

Civic apathy is fertile ground for the unethical to thrive. Plato reminds us that **silence, passivity, and detachment are not neutral acts**—they are moral absences that permit injustice to take root. Active ethical participation is the duty of every good citizen.

- a. "When mores are sufficient, laws are unnecessary; when mores are insufficient, laws are unenforceable." — Émile Durkheim (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Émile Durkheim emphasizes that if people act morally by habit and conviction, laws are rarely needed. However, when shared values erode, no law—however strong—can effectively govern behavior.

This is a powerful reminder that **law without social morality is hollow**, and enforcement without ethical grounding becomes nearly impossible.

Contemporary Relevance:

1. Law Working Where Mores Are Strong:

- In countries like **Japan or Nordic nations**, social values ensure public discipline—cleanliness, honesty, punctuality—without heavy policing.
- In communities where **honesty is culturally embedded**, even absence of strict tax enforcement doesn't lead to large-scale evasion.

2. Laws Failing Where Mores Are Weak:

- **Anti-corruption laws** in India and many developing nations exist, but systemic bribery persists because society often sees it as "acceptable" or "necessary."
- **Traffic rules**, despite fines and monitoring, are widely violated where civic responsibility is not internalised.
- **Environmental regulations** are hard to implement when public consciousness about sustainability is low.

Durkheim's insight reinforces that **moral education, cultural values, and ethical leadership** are more critical than simply passing laws. A rule-bound society without internal ethics breeds compliance only out of fear—not conviction.

Conclusion

A morally conscious society needs fewer laws, as values guide behavior better than enforcement. As Gandhi said, "You can't legislate morality, but you can nurture it." Strong mores build lasting order and ethical citizenship.

- b. "Men are mortal. So are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering. Otherwise, both will wither and die."— B.R Ambedkar (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Dr. Ambedkar uses a simple metaphor to convey a profound truth: **ideas, no matter how powerful or revolutionary, cannot survive on their own.** Like a plant that withers without water, an idea dies without constant engagement, reflection, and dissemination. Ethical, social, or political progress is only possible when ideas are **kept alive through dialogue, education, and implementation.**

Contemporary Relevance:

1. **Democracy and Constitutional Values:** Despite being the world's largest democracy, **constitutional values like secularism, fraternity, and tolerance** are increasingly challenged by polarisation and hate speech.
 - ✓ If civic education and public discourse don't reinforce these ideals, they risk being eroded.
2. **Social Justice and Reservation:** The idea behind **reservation** was to uplift historically marginalised communities.
 - ✓ However, misuse, politicisation, and lack of awareness about its ethical roots (not just legal) have led to rising resentment and dilution of the original intent.
3. **Gender Equality:** Movements like #MeToo highlighted the **importance of propagating gender sensitivity.**
 - ✓ But without continuous action in workplaces, schools, and homes, progress may be reversed, and the idea may fade into tokenism.
4. **Climate Consciousness:** While terms like "net zero" and "climate justice" are now common, **real behavioural change is slow.**
 - ✓ Without sustained public campaigns and youth engagement, environmental ideals risk becoming mere buzzwords.
5. **Right to Information (RTI):** The RTI Act empowered citizens, but its use has declined in recent years.
 - ✓ Lack of awareness and shrinking civil society activism show that even transformative ideas can fade when not actively promoted.
6. **Digital Literacy and Data Ethics:** As technology spreads, ideas like **digital responsibility, privacy, and cyber ethics** need strong public discourse and education.
 - ✓ Otherwise, unethical tech usage and surveillance capitalism may become the norm.

Great ideas do not live in books—they live in action. **Ethical responsibility includes not just believing in right ideas, but also communicating and living them.** Propagation is the moral oxygen for any reform or ideal.

Conclusion

Ideas thrive through action and conviction. Civil servants must uphold and propagate constitutional ideals—justice, equality, liberty—ensuring these values are practiced daily, not merely preserved in laws or documents.

Q.8) “The great virtue of bureaucracy is its indifference to persons. It is simply a cog in a rational machine.” — Max Weber. In the Indian context, how does this impersonality of bureaucracy create both ethical strength and moral dilemmas? Discuss (150 words)

Introduction

Max Weber saw bureaucracy as a rule-bound, impersonal system ensuring objectivity. In India, this fosters ethical fairness, yet creates dilemmas when rigid procedures overlook human suffering, social context, or the need for compassionate discretion.

Body**Strengths of Bureaucratic Impersonality:**

- **Ensures equality before law:** Civil servants rejecting VIP treatment in hospitals or passport offices, treating every citizen the same, strengthens the rule of law.
- **Prevents nepotism and political interference:** Officers like Ashok Khemka, who consistently resisted political pressure in land dealings, demonstrate ethical adherence through rule-based decision-making.
- **Promotes rule-based governance:** Implementation of welfare schemes like Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) ensures uniform delivery, irrespective of political or personal bias.
- **Strengthens transparency and accountability:** Platforms like e-Sampark and RTI portals reduce human discretion and enable citizens to demand fair, impersonal service.

Moral Dilemmas Arising from Impersonality:

- **Leads to rigidity in exceptional cases:** Denial of rations due to Aadhaar mismatch in states like Jharkhand, even when the beneficiary is in distress, shows lack of compassionate discretion.
- **Creates emotional distance from citizens:** During COVID-19 lockdowns, some officials stuck strictly to rules and denied migrants transportation, overlooking humanitarian concerns.

- **Causes conflict between law and justice:** Demolitions of slum dwellings in Delhi without prior rehabilitation reflect legal correctness but violate ethical obligations to human dignity.
- **Encourages bureaucratic apathy:** Delay in disbursing cyclone or flood relief due to file-based delays, as seen in Odisha and Assam, undermines timely public service.

Conclusion

Impersonality provides bureaucratic strength by promoting fairness and resisting bias. However, in a country as diverse and unequal as India, civil servants must combine rule-following with **empathy, and situational awareness**.

Q.9) What is meant by data ethics in the digital age? Discuss its foundational principles and critically assess the extent to which the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 embodies these ethical considerations. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Data ethics in the digital age refers to the responsible collection, use, sharing, and protection of personal data, ensuring that technological advancement does not violate privacy, autonomy, or dignity of individuals in a digitised society.

Body

Foundational Principles of Data Ethics:

- **Informed Consent:** Individuals must understand and willingly agree to how their data is used, e.g., GDPR mandates clear opt-in mechanisms.
- **Transparency:** Organisations should disclose data handling practices; ethical data use demands openness, not hidden processing.
- **Privacy:** Data must be protected from unauthorised access or misuse, as privacy is a fundamental right under Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (2017).
- **Purpose Limitation:** Data should be used only for the reason it was collected, preventing surveillance or function creep.
- **Accountability:** Entities must be held responsible for breaches or unethical practices; ethical governance includes audit trails and grievance mechanisms.
- **Data Minimisation:** Only necessary data should be collected; excessive data collection increases misuse risk.

Assessment of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023:

- **Strengths:**

- ✓ Recognises the **right to consent and grievance redressal**: Individuals can now file complaints if data is mishandled.
- ✓ Introduces **Data Fiduciary obligations**: Organisations must inform users about data collection and usage clearly.
- ✓ Establishes the **Data Protection Board of India**: Aims to ensure enforcement and accountability.
- ✓ Enshrines '**purpose limitation**' and '**data minimisation**' as guiding principles.

- **Limitations:**

- ✓ **Broad exemptions to the State**: Government agencies can process personal data without consent for "national interest," risking misuse.
- ✓ **Consent architecture is still weak**: Pre-ticked boxes or vague terms may dilute real informed consent.
- ✓ **Limited autonomy for the Data Protection Board**: Its executive control raises concerns about independence.
- ✓ **No right to data portability or algorithmic transparency**, both crucial to ethical digital empowerment.

Conclusion

The DPDP Act 2023 is a step forward in aligning governance with data ethics, but meaningful digital justice requires stronger consent norms, institutional independence, and a citizen-first approach that upholds dignity over efficiency.

Q.10) The question of reservation in India has evolved from a historical mechanism for achieving social justice to a contemporary debate encompassing economic criteria and political contestation. In this context, examine the ethical dimensions of the reservation discourse, highlighting arguments both in favour and against, from an ethical standpoint. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Reservation, originally a moral response to caste-based discrimination, now raises ethical dilemmas involving justice, equity, and merit. The debate reflects tensions between **deontological duty** to correct injustice and the **utilitarian goal** of collective welfare.

Body

Ethical Arguments in Favour of Reservation:

- **Corrective Justice (Rawlsian ethics):** Reservation helps rectify historical inequality by prioritising the worst-off; it promotes **fair equality of opportunity** over formal equality.
- **Deontological Responsibility:** The state has a moral obligation to dismantle structural oppression, regardless of consequences, based on the duty to uphold **human dignity** and **social justice**.
- **Utilitarian Welfare:** By empowering marginalised groups through access to education and jobs, reservation enhances overall societal welfare and **reduces social friction**.
- **Virtue Ethics – Compassion and Empathy:** Supporting disadvantaged groups fosters an ethical society grounded in **moral character** and solidarity.
- **Democratic Inclusiveness:** Representation of SC/ST/OBC groups in institutions strengthens **procedural justice** and ethical legitimacy of governance.

Ethical Arguments Against Reservation:

- **Merit vs Equity Dilemma (Consequentialism):** Critics argue that if reservation leads to inefficiency or perceived unfairness, it may reduce institutional effectiveness, challenging **utility-based ethics**.
- **Reverse Discrimination (Kantian Ethics):** Preferential treatment based on birth rather than individual effort may violate the principle of **universal moral worth**.
- **Caste Entrenchment:** Instead of eroding caste identity, reservations may inadvertently solidify it, conflicting with the **teleological ideal** of a casteless society.
- **Political Instrumentalisation:** When used for **vote-bank politics** rather than ethical reform, reservation loses its moral grounding and becomes a tool of expediency.
- **Question of Criteria:** The inclusion of EWS reservation raises ethical questions on whether **economic disadvantage alone** should override **historic structural exclusion**, creating **horizontal equity** concerns.

Conclusion

Reservation must evolve as an ethical instrument—not just a political one—balancing **justice as fairness** with **public good**. Its future lies in transparent, inclusive policies that honour both **historical duty** and **contemporary moral reasoning**.

Q.11) To what extent can corruption in public service be curbed through systemic interventions such as digitisation and transparency mechanisms? Critically examine whether ethical values and individual integrity remain essential despite institutional safeguards. Illustrate with examples. (150 words, 10 marks)

Introduction

Corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain. While systemic reforms like digitisation have curbed avenues of malpractice, their effectiveness is limited without a corresponding rise in ethical values.

Body

Systemic Interventions

Technological and institutional reforms have significantly contributed to reducing the space for discretionary corruption in public service.

- **Digitisation:** Platforms like DBT and GeM have automated welfare transfers and procurement, cutting down human interface and limiting bribery in delivery systems.
- **Transparency:** Laws like RTI and platforms like Jan Soochna Portal empower citizens to demand information, exposing irregularities in schemes such as MGNREGA and PDS.
- **E-governance:** Initiatives like Bhoomi (land record digitisation) and e-tendering systems increase traceability, curbing manual manipulation in areas like land registration and contract awards.
- **Grievance redressal:** Citizen charters and online portals ensure time-bound service delivery in schemes like Passport Seva, reinforcing Rawlsian justice through procedural fairness and accountability.

Limitations

Despite these interventions, corruption persists in evolved and more sophisticated forms, often subverting the very systems meant to prevent it.

- **GeM misuse:** Vendors collude or use proxy bidding to inflate prices, undermining the ethical goal of transparent procurement.
- **DBT fraud:** Fake Aadhaar-linked accounts are created to siphon off welfare funds, turning a pro-poor reform into a leak-prone mechanism.
- **RTI evasion:** Delayed, vague responses and threats to RTI activists weaken transparency and disincentivise civic oversight.
- **Tender collusion:** Contractors submit identical bids using informal cartels, bypassing the competitive spirit of e-tendering.

- **Digital divide:** Rural and illiterate citizens often depend on middlemen to access services, reintroducing corruption in the name of digital governance.

These examples show that **systems can be circumvented if the intent to act ethically is missing.**

Ethical Imperatives

Where systemic controls end, personal ethics must begin. The integrity of public service ultimately depends on the moral fibre of the individual.

- **Duty-bound behaviour:** Officers like E. Sreedharan embodied deontological ethics, acting with integrity not because of oversight, but from a deep sense of duty.
- **Courage in grey zones:** Ashok Khemka's resistance to political interference in sensitive land deals reflects virtue ethics—doing what is right even when institutions are silent.
- **Conscience-led action:** Major scams in education, mining, and revenue were not uncovered by audits but by insiders who acted on moral conviction.
- **Service-driven mindset:** During the COVID-19 crisis, IAS officers in Kerala and elsewhere ensured inclusive relief—not by the book, but led by empathy and commitment to the public good.

Conclusion

Systemic safeguards deter corruption, but integrity removes intent. Ethical governance demands core values like honesty, empathy, and accountability, upheld by a strong code of ethics, regular training, transparency, and a public service ethos serving the common good.

Q.12) You are Officer A, the Chief Executive Officer of Project X Ltd., a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) formed under a joint venture between the State Government and a central energy PSU to execute a large solar-thermal hybrid power project in Region Y — a backward but strategically vital area with frequent power outages. The government has declared it a "Flagship Fast-Track Project" under the 'Power for Progress' Mission, promising 24x7 electricity and job creation in five adjoining districts.

The site selected lies at the foothills of the Z Hills, near the River P. It has been marked suitable by technical, environmental, and financial feasibility reports. However, the area is inhabited by a vulnerable tribal community, some of whom claim traditional forest rights under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Around 300 families live in scattered hamlets, and many hold religious sentiments attached to the nearby sacred grove.

Initially, there was strong opposition led by Village Elder B, fearing displacement, cultural loss, and resource access issues. After several meetings, many agreed to the project, lured by promises of resettlement, compensation, and skill training.

Construction began. However, three months later, activist C, associated with an environmental NGO, filed a petition alleging that the project violates environmental norms and displaces people without Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). He also alleges that Contractor D, in charge of site clearance, used intimidation tactics. A few relocated families now claim they were misled.

The local MLA has started making political statements, and media houses have picked up the story. Public perception is shifting, and protests have resumed. Meanwhile, the government is pushing for faster completion, citing national interest and rising project costs.

As Officer A, you are bound by deadlines, institutional responsibility, and public service ethics. You also face personal pressure, as your career growth is closely linked to the project's success.

Questions

- What are the key ethical dilemmas and issues in this situation?
- What steps will you take to reconcile conflicting interests of the community, the environment, and the state?
- Do you think the project should be paused for further review, even at the cost of deadlines and finances? Justify your stand.

Introduction

This case presents a high-stakes ethical dilemma where a public-private energy project, though aimed at regional development and national interest, clashes with tribal rights, environmental concerns, and procedural fairness. As CEO of Project X Ltd., my decisions must balance **development goals**, **public accountability**, and **constitutional values**, all under the weight of political pressure and career consequences.

Identification of Stakeholders

Body

Stakeholder	Concerns / Interests
1. Tribal Community	Displacement, cultural loss, sacred grove, livelihood, forest rights
2. Project X Ltd. (SPV)	Timely execution, financial integrity, public credibility
3. Activist C and NGO	Environmental compliance, tribal rights, ethical oversight
4. Contractor D	Project execution, profits; accused of misconduct
5. Local MLA / Political Class	Political capital, public narrative
6. Government (State & Central)	Success of flagship scheme, regional development

7. Media and General Public	Transparency, justice, environmental and cultural concerns
8. Officer A (myself)	Ethical obligations, professional accountability, career risk

(a) Ethical Dilemmas and Issues

The situation involves the following ethical dilemmas:

- 1. Development vs. Rights of Vulnerable Communities:** The project aims to uplift backward districts, but may **infringe upon tribal land, cultural heritage, and sacred ecology** protected under **Forest Rights Act, 2006**.
- 2. Consent and Misrepresentation:** Allegations suggest that **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)** was not adequately ensured. If some families were misled, it violates **autonomy, dignity, and informed decision-making**.
- 3. Coercion and Misconduct:** Contractor D's alleged intimidation tactics raise serious concerns about **probity, fairness, and the use of unethical means** for fast-tracking.
- 4. Environmental Compliance:** The NGO's petition claims the project **bypassed norms**; continuing without review may breach the **precautionary principle** and damage fragile ecosystems.
- 5. Public Pressure vs. Ethical Responsibility:** As Officer A, I face **personal career stakes**, institutional pressure, and political demands — creating a conflict between **self-interest and moral courage**.
- 6. Transparency and Trust:** With rising protests and media coverage, public trust is eroding. Ethical governance demands **transparency, engagement, and corrective action**.

(b) Steps to Reconcile Interests of Community, Environment, and State

To resolve the conflict ethically and sustainably, I would take the following actions:

1. Immediate Suspension of Displacement Activities

- Halt relocation and further land clearing until clarity is established.
- This prevents **irreversible harm**, restores trust, and shows administrative responsibility.

2. Independent Multidisciplinary Review

- Establish a review panel comprising:

- Tribal rights experts
- Environmental scientists
- Legal professionals
- Local representatives
- Their mandate:
 - Assess **validity of consent**
 - Review **environmental compliance**
 - Investigate **alleged misconduct**

3. Re-engagement Through Genuine Gram Sabha Consultations

- Under **PESA Act** and **Forest Rights Act**, organize fresh, well-facilitated **Gram Sabhas** with:
 - Neutral translators
 - Gender-inclusive forums
 - Participation of youth and elders
- Ensure the process meets **FPIC norms** in both **spirit and letter**.

4. Action Against Unethical Conduct

- If Contractor D is found guilty of coercion:
 - **Terminate the contract**
 - Refer to regulatory authorities for action under contract law and human rights codes
- This demonstrates **institutional integrity** and **accountability**.

5. Strengthened Rehabilitation and Livelihood Plan

- Improve:
 - **Resettlement packages**
 - **Skill training access**
 - **Employment guarantees** within the project
- Declare the **sacred grove a protected no-construction zone**, respecting cultural and spiritual values.

6. Transparent Public Communication

- Hold public briefings and use community radio/local media to explain:
 - Project status
 - Steps taken
 - Community rights
- Transparency here builds **trust** and **mitigates misinformation**.

(c) Should the Project Be Paused for Further Review?

Yes — Temporarily Pausing the Project Is Ethically Justified

1. Upholding Legal and Constitutional Mandates: Ignoring **Forest Rights Act, Article 21** (Right to life with dignity), and **Article 25** (freedom of religion) may lead to judicial intervention and reputational damage.

2. Ethical Governance > Expedient Execution: True public service requires respecting the rights of the least empowered, even if deadlines suffer. This reflects **moral courage, empathy, and integrity**.

3. Long-Term Sustainability: A short pause avoids **long-term litigation**, community hostility, and reputational fallout. It reflects a **precautionary and participatory approach** to development.

4. Trust-Building and Conflict Prevention: Involving communities again and rectifying errors shows a commitment to **inclusive governance**, which can turn protests into participation.

5. Administrative Maturity: Voluntarily reviewing and correcting the process enhances institutional credibility and sets a **positive precedent** for similar projects in sensitive regions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, pausing the project for an honest review is not a delay — it is a **correction of course**, aligned with the ideals of **ethical governance, justice, and sustainable development**. As Officer A, I must lead with **integrity, constitutional fidelity**, and a **human-centered approach** — delivering progress without compromising principles.

Q.13) You are Officer A, a senior Indian diplomat and permanent representative at the United Nations Headquarters in City X. A critical Humanitarian and Development Resolution (HDR-27) is up for vote in the General Assembly. This resolution, spearheaded by India and a coalition of Global South nations, seeks to secure concessional aid, technology transfer, and sustainable infrastructure investments for drought-prone and poverty-affected regions across Asia and Africa.

If passed, the resolution would unlock \$500 million in international development grants, aid over 20 million people, and enhance India's moral standing as a leader of the Global South. The resolution requires a two-thirds majority, and every vote counts.

During last-mile negotiations with diplomats from Country B and Country C — influential swing voters — you are discreetly told by their envoys that they will support India's resolution only if India fast-tracks certain pending commercial defence and infrastructure deals involving a controversial business conglomerate from their country, whose owner has faced media scrutiny for unethical practices elsewhere.

You are aware that:

These deals have previously been red-flagged by Indian regulatory agencies.

There is pressure from certain quarters in the Indian delegation to "consider the deal in national interest."

Not getting these votes could cause the humanitarian resolution to fail, hurting India's image and millions in need.

Your diplomatic integrity and future reputation are also at stake.

Questions

- a) What are the key ethical issues involved in this case?
- b) Would you agree to negotiate business deals in return for humanitarian votes? Why or why not?
- c) What alternative measures can you explore to safeguard both India's diplomatic mission and ethical integrity?
- d) In such multilateral negotiations, how can diplomats balance national interest with ethical principles?

Introduction

This case presents a high-stakes ethical dilemma faced by a senior Indian diplomat at the United Nations, involving a crucial humanitarian resolution that could impact millions in the Global South. The situation demands a careful reconciliation of national interest, personal integrity, diplomatic ethics, and global responsibility.

Body

As **Officer A**, the choice lies between **ethically questionable concessions** and **upholding the norms of transparency, rule-based governance, and international credibility**.

Identification of Stakeholders

1. **Officer A (Indian Permanent Representative)** – Responsible for upholding India's diplomatic and ethical reputation.
2. **Government of India** – Seeks international recognition and success in leading the Global South.

3. **People in Drought- and Poverty-Affected Regions** – Potential beneficiaries of the resolution, whose welfare depends on its passage.
4. **Countries B and C** – Swing voters using their vote to extract commercial favours.
5. **Indian Regulatory Agencies** – Responsible for ensuring due diligence and legality in commercial transactions.
6. **Controversial Foreign Conglomerate** – Seeking rehabilitation through business deals despite past scrutiny.
7. **Media and Civil Society** – Watchdogs of transparency, integrity, and government accountability.
8. **The United Nations System** – As a multilateral institution committed to ethical governance and equitable development.

(a) Key Ethical Issues Involved

1. **Instrumentality:** Linking the resolution to commercial deals commodifies a humanitarian issue and undermines the spirit of international development cooperation.
2. **Violation of Procedural Integrity:** The proposed deals were previously red-flagged by regulatory bodies. Circumventing due process would compromise institutional ethics and the rule of law.
3. **Conflict of Interest:** Pressure from within the Indian delegation to “act in national interest” may conflict with Officer A’s ethical obligations to transparency, legality, and long-term diplomatic credibility.
4. **Moral Compromise :** Accepting the proposal sets a dangerous precedent—legitimising the use of morally compromised entities as bargaining tools in global governance.
5. **Erosion of India’s Diplomatic Standing:** Such transactional diplomacy risks tarnishing India's image as a principled and responsible global actor, especially when leading humanitarian efforts.

(b) Would You Agree to Negotiate Business Deals in Return for Humanitarian Votes?

No, I would not agree to negotiate such business deals.

Justification:

1. **Contrary to Legal and Regulatory Mandates:** Proceeding with deals that have been flagged by Indian regulatory agencies compromises legal propriety and administrative accountability.
2. **Undermining Ethical Diplomacy:** Diplomacy rooted in ethical values should not facilitate quid pro quo arrangements that enable questionable commercial entities to circumvent scrutiny.
3. **Risk to Institutional Credibility:** If exposed, such a compromise could delegitimise both the resolution and India's broader diplomatic efforts, attracting criticism from international media, watchdogs, and peer states.
4. **Long-Term Strategic Harm:** While the resolution may pass in the short term, the ethical and reputational cost could impair India's soft power and credibility in future multilateral negotiations.
5. **Violation of Public Trust:** The Indian public and the international community expect diplomats to uphold standards of integrity, not sacrifice them for expediency.

Hence, while the intended outcome of passing HDR-27 is noble, the means to achieve it must also be ethically sound.

(c) What Alternative Measures Can Be Explored to Safeguard Both India's Diplomatic Mission and Ethical Integrity?

1. **Broaden the Coalition of Support:** Engage with undecided member states and build a wider consensus around HDR-27 based on shared development goals. Small island nations, African Union members, or Latin American countries may be more responsive to value-based appeals.
2. **Leverage Multilateral Institutions:** Seek the moral and institutional endorsement of UN agencies such as UNDP, UNEP, and UNCTAD to bolster the resolution's legitimacy and apply indirect pressure on fence-sitting states.
3. **Issue-Based Framing and Public Diplomacy:** Reframe the resolution in public forums as a global moral imperative rather than a geopolitical agenda. This shifts the discourse from transactional politics to shared human responsibility.
4. **Institutional Response to Deal Proposals:** Respond formally to the offer from Countries B and C by explaining that commercial deals must undergo standard regulatory scrutiny in India. This separates diplomacy from internal policy processes, upholding transparency.

5. **Internal Escalation and Policy Guidance:** Inform the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) about the attempted conditionality, ensuring that all decisions are institutionally backed, thereby shielding the individual officer from undue pressure.

(d) How Can Diplomats Balance National Interest with Ethical Principles in Multilateral Negotiations?

Balancing national interest with ethics requires a framework grounded in **constitutional morality**, **international norms**, and **public service values**. Diplomats can manage this balance through the following:

1. **Ethical Realism:** Recognise realpolitik constraints but reject practices that violate foundational principles. Sustainable diplomacy combines strategic acumen with moral credibility.
2. **Rule-Based Engagement:** Adhere strictly to institutional processes and legal safeguards. National interest cannot be pursued at the cost of **procedural justice** or **regulatory independence**.
3. **Soft Power:** Promote India's global standing through principled leadership. Upholding ethics enhances soft power and builds trust-based partnerships, particularly with developing countries.
4. **Differentiation Between Policy Domains:** Keep humanitarian diplomacy distinct from commercial negotiations. Mixing these domains dilutes ethical clarity and increases the risk of undue influence and regulatory capture.
5. **Long-Term Vision:** Avoid short-term diplomatic gains that come at the cost of long-term reputational and strategic capital. Public servants must act with foresight, integrity, and accountability.

Conclusion

The temptation to achieve a noble goal through ethically questionable means is real, but public servants must remain rooted in constitutional values and moral integrity. As Officer A, my foremost duty is to ensure that India's diplomatic success does not come at the cost of ethical compromise.

Q.14) You are Dr. A, a government-appointed sports physician attached to the national wrestling contingent preparing for the Olympic Games. As part of routine pre-departure internal testing, a top-seeded wrestler, Athlete X, is found to have tested positive for a banned performance-enhancing substance. The substance is on the WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) prohibited list and would immediately disqualify the athlete if officially reported.

Athlete X is a national icon, a world championship winner, and widely projected to win India's first-ever Olympic gold in wrestling. The result has not yet been forwarded to international bodies, and no further tests are mandated before the Olympic bout. The coaching team, including Manager B, discreetly requests you to suppress the test result, arguing that:

- The test was internal and non-binding as per Olympic protocol.
- It is a matter of national pride and morale, especially in an election year.
- The medication was likely "accidental" or trace-based from supplements.
- You will be "taken care of" in terms of a foreign training trip and fast-track promotions.
- If you speak out, the athlete's entire Olympic dream will collapse, and public outrage may follow.

Questions

- What are the key ethical dilemmas in this situation?
- Would suppressing the result be justifiable in the interest of national prestige? Explain.
- What course of action would you take to balance your professional ethics and public expectations?
- How can institutions build systems to prevent such conflicts and protect whistleblowers in sports?

Introduction

This case presents an ethical conflict in the high-stakes world of competitive sports. Dr. A, a government-appointed sports physician, must decide whether to report a top athlete's doping violation before the Olympics. The situation tests the values of **professional integrity, fairness in sport, transparency, and resistance to inducement or pressure**, all within the context of national expectations and systemic weaknesses.

Body

Stakeholder Identification

Stakeholder	Interests / Concerns
1. Dr. A (Sports Physician)	Ethical duty, professional integrity, legal liability
2. Athlete X	Career, reputation, Olympic dreams
3. Manager B & Coaching Team	National pride, professional recognition
4. Indian Sports Authorities (NADA, IOA)	Regulatory compliance, institutional credibility
5. Clean Competitors (Domestic & Global)	Fair play, level playing field

6. General Public / Nation	National pride, trust in sports ethics
7. International Sports Bodies (WADA, IOC)	Upholding global anti-doping norms
8. Media / Civil Society	Right to transparency, holding institutions accountable

(a) Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

1. **Integrity vs. National Pressured.** A is asked to compromise medical and professional integrity for national pride and institutional interest.
2. **Transparency vs. Concealment:** Suppressing the result violates ethical principles of truthfulness, fairness, and public trust.
3. **Conflict of Interest and Personal Gain:** Offers of foreign trips and promotions create a direct conflict with impartial decision-making.
4. **Rule of Law vs. Emotional Appeals:** Arguments based on accidental ingestion or emotional pressure undermine the objective enforcement of anti-doping codes.
5. **Impact on Clean Sport:** Allowing a doped athlete to compete unjustly disadvantages other athletes and corrupts the integrity of competition.

(b) Should the Result Be Suppressed in the Interest of National Prestige?

No. Suppressing the test result would not be ethically or legally justifiable.

- **Violation of WADA Protocol:** The use of a banned substance, regardless of how it entered the body, constitutes a doping violation.
- **Damage to India's Sporting Reputation:** If later exposed, the cover-up would cause a greater scandal and erode public trust.
- **Undermining Fair Play:** It compromises clean athletes' rights and contradicts the core values of sportsmanship.
- **Unethical Precedent:** It would signal institutional willingness to compromise values for medals or political optics.

(c) Ethical Course of Action

1. **Report to the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA):** As per protocol, submit the findings immediately for formal adjudication.

2. **Maintain Confidentiality Until Official Announcement:** Respect due process and avoid public speculation or reputational damage.
3. **Refuse Personal Favors and Document Pressure:** Record any attempts to influence decision-making to protect personal and professional integrity.
4. **Counsel the Athlete Privately:** Help Athlete X understand the long-term implications and possibly self-withdraw with dignity.
5. **Uphold Ethical and Legal Duty:** Align actions with medical ethics, WADA compliance, and the larger interest of clean sports.

(d) Institutional Measures for Prevention and Protection

1. **Mandatory Reporting Systems:** Establish protocols that make internal test results automatically reportable, with no discretion.
2. **Whistleblower Protection Mechanisms:** Enact sports-sector-specific safeguards similar to public interest disclosures, shielding ethical professionals from retaliation.
3. **Independent Testing Oversight:** Involve neutral third-party labs or agencies for critical events to prevent internal manipulation.
4. **Ethics Training for Sports Officials:** Sensitize managers, coaches, and support staff on integrity in sport and consequences of cover-ups.
5. **Incentives for Clean Athletes and Professionals:** Redesign performance and promotion criteria to reward ethical behavior, not just results.

Conclusion

As Dr. A, my duty lies in **upholding truth, ensuring fairness, and protecting the credibility of Indian sports**. While the emotional and political pressures are real, professional ethics cannot be sacrificed for short-term glory. Long-lasting national pride stems from **integrity and fair competition**, not from compromised victories. Upholding ethical standards strengthens institutions and preserves the sanctity of sport.

Q.15) You are Officer A, serving as an external member on the interview panel for selecting the Head of Administration at College X, a prestigious government-aided institution. The recruitment process has been highly competitive, and after multiple rounds of screening, only five candidates have been shortlisted for the final interview stage.

On the morning of the interview, while verifying candidate details, you notice that one of the shortlisted applicants is Candidate B, the daughter of your longtime friend C. This same friend had taken you on an all-expenses-paid spiritual retreat the previous week — covering

travel, stay, and other hospitality — as a gesture of personal goodwill. At the time, you were unaware that his daughter was in the running for this post.

Now, fully aware of the situation, you face an internal ethical conflict. Candidate B appears well-qualified on paper, but your recent association with her parent may raise questions of fairness, transparency, and impartiality in public perception.

You are expected to maintain neutrality, ensure merit-based selection, and uphold the credibility of the institution and the selection process.

- What are the ethical issues involved in this case?
- How would you respond to this situation, keeping in mind both institutional integrity and personal morality?
- Should disclosure of past relationships or benefits be mandatory for public officials in recruitment roles? Justify.
- What steps can institutions take to prevent and manage such ethical conflicts in future selection processes?

Introduction

This case presents a subtle yet significant ethical dilemma involving **conflict of interest, procedural fairness, transparency, and institutional credibility**. As Officer A, a member of the interview panel, the recent acceptance of hospitality from a candidate's parent—albeit unknowingly—raises a question about perceived bias. Even if unintentional, such associations may affect the fairness of the process and damage public trust.

Stakeholder Identification

Body

Stakeholder	Concerns / Interests
1. Officer A (Interview Panel Member)	Upholding integrity, impartiality, and professional credibility
2. Candidate B	Fair and merit-based evaluation
3. Friend C (Candidate's Parent)	Personal interest in daughter's success
4. Other Candidates	Equal opportunity, unbiased assessment
5. College X and its Governing Body	Institutional transparency and legitimacy
6. Public / Media / Civil Society	Trust in public recruitment processes
7. Government and Oversight Authorities	Ensuring integrity in state-aided institutions

(a) Ethical Issues Involved

1. **Conflict of Interest:** The recent hospitality from Friend C, though unrelated to the recruitment, now creates a **perceived or potential conflict** due to familial ties with a candidate.
2. **Perception vs. Intent:** Even if Officer A remains neutral, the **perception of bias** can erode public trust in the process and damage the institution's credibility.
3. **Professional Duty vs. Personal Relationship:** Officer A must balance personal ties with the professional obligation to ensure **merit-based and impartial decision-making**.
4. **Transparency and Accountability:** Not disclosing the relationship could lead to allegations of **non-disclosure, favoritism, or procedural impropriety**.

(b) Ethical Response to the Situation

The most appropriate course of action involves the following steps:

1. **Immediate Voluntary Disclosure:** Inform the panel chairperson and the institutional authorities about the recent association with Candidate B's parent. This reflects **transparency and integrity**.
2. **Recusal from the Interview Panel for Candidate B:** Step aside from the interview or evaluation of Candidate B alone, or recuse entirely from the panel to avoid any perception of favoritism or bias.
3. **Provide Written Clarification:** Submit a formal note to the institutional body documenting the timeline and context of the hospitality received—emphasizing that the link to the candidate was unknown at the time.
4. **Maintain Strict Confidentiality and Impartiality:** Avoid any direct or indirect contact with the candidate or her parent during the process. Ensure the final outcome is based solely on merit.

This approach protects both personal morality and institutional credibility.

(c) Should Disclosure of Past Relationships or Benefits Be Mandatory for Public Officials in Recruitment Roles?

Yes, such disclosure should be mandatory.

Justification:

1. **Promotes Transparency:** Ensures that recruitment and evaluation processes are perceived as free from bias, enhancing public confidence.
2. **Mitigates Risk of Institutional Compromise:** Even inadvertent conflicts can lead to reputational harm, litigation, or contestation of appointments.

3. **Encourages Ethical Vigilance:** Makes public officials more aware of boundaries in their personal and professional conduct, fostering **accountability and moral awareness**.
4. **Global Best Practices:** Many international public institutions (e.g., in the EU and UN) mandate declarations of interest to uphold fairness in decision-making.

That said, disclosure must be contextual, proportionate, and followed by independent review to assess whether recusal is required.

(d) Institutional Steps to Prevent and Manage Ethical Conflicts in Recruitment

1. **Mandatory Conflict of Interest Declarations:** Require all interview panel members to submit a signed declaration of any personal or professional ties with candidates before final interviews.
2. **Standardized Recusal Protocols:** Develop clear guidelines on when and how members should recuse themselves from proceedings in case of potential conflicts.
3. **Pre-Interview Ethics Briefings:** Conduct short orientations for panel members to sensitize them to **ethical risks, institutional expectations, and public accountability**.
4. **Independent Oversight Mechanisms:** Have an ethics committee or independent observer monitor the process for fairness and transparency.
5. **Post-Selection Audits:** Randomly review high-stakes appointments to ensure the integrity of the process, particularly in public institutions.

Conclusion

As Officer A, the ethically sound action is to disclose the personal association, recuse from the evaluation, and allow the process to proceed without compromise. **Institutions must not only be fair but must also appear fair.** Safeguarding procedural integrity protects both individual conscience and the public trust on which democratic institutions are built.

Q.16) In the aftermath of the tragic death of a popular actor, Ashok., national media outlets turned their spotlight on Gunjan., his partner, who was soon subjected to intense public scrutiny. Without a formal conviction or trial, she was portrayed by many news channels as the primary suspect in the case. Prime-time debates, WhatsApp forwards, and social media storms labeled her a "murderer", a "drug queen", and more — despite no conclusive evidence being presented at that point.

During this time, leaked chats, private videos, and unverified claims were routinely circulated by news outlets in the race for TRPs (Television Rating Points). A few journalists attempted balanced reporting, but the dominant media narrative resembled a digital lynch mob, influencing public opinion, policy priorities, and even investigative agencies

As an ethics advisor to the Press Council, you are asked to examine the wider implications of this case for media ethics in India.

Questions

- a) What are the ethical issues prevalent in the profession of media as seen in this case?
- b) How does unethical reporting and sensationalism impact individuals, institutions, and society at large?
- c) What systemic reforms and ethical frameworks can be institutionalized to strengthen responsible journalism while respecting press freedom?

Introduction

This case highlights a disturbing instance of **media sensationalism**, where journalistic standards were compromised in the pursuit of viewership. The portrayal of Gunjan as guilty in the absence of formal investigation or trial exemplifies a breakdown in **media responsibility**, **due process**, and **constitutional ethics**. As an ethics advisor to the Press Council, my role is to examine the deeper ethical failures and propose systemic reforms.

Body

(a) Ethical Issues in the Profession of Media in This Case

1. **Violation of the Presumption of Innocence:** Labeling Gunjan a criminal without legal conviction breaches a fundamental principle of justice under **Article 21** of the Constitution (right to life and dignity).
2. **Sensationalism for TRPs:** The prioritization of entertainment value over truth violates **journalistic objectivity** and the **code of ethical reporting**.
3. **Invasion of Privacy:** Publishing leaked chats and private videos constitutes **unauthorized surveillance and character assassination**, undermining **human dignity**.
4. **Trial by Media:** Media prematurely assumed the role of judge, jury, and executioner, thereby **undermining the judiciary and investigative process**.
5. **Lack of Accountability:** Many media outlets lacked mechanisms for **correction, retraction, or apology**, reflecting **absence of institutional self-regulation**.
6. **Exploitation of Gender Stereotypes:** The narrative around Gunjan often carried implicit biases, feeding into **misogyny and moral policing**, which further deepens ethical violations.

(b) Impact of Unethical Reporting and Sensationalism

1. On Individuals:

- **Emotional and Psychological Harm:** Gunjan likely faced trauma, social isolation, and reputational damage without recourse to justice.
- **Violation of Legal Rights:** Trial by media interferes with the right to a fair trial and the right to privacy.
- **Social Prejudice:** The individual becomes a victim of **mob justice and online harassment**.

2. On Institutions:

- **Undermining Judicial Independence:** Prejudicial coverage can pressure courts and investigators, compromising due process.
- **Loss of Public Trust in Media:** Sensationalism erodes the **credibility of journalism as the fourth estate**.
- **Distortion of Policy Priorities:** Media-driven narratives often **divert attention from structural issues** to superficial controversies.

3. On Society:

- **Polarization and Vigilantism:** Trial by media can provoke **social divisions, moral panic**, and misinformed public outrage.
- **Normalizing Ethical Breaches:** Viewers become desensitized to violations of privacy and due process.
- **Chilling Effect on Press Freedom:** Unethical reporting weakens the legitimacy of genuine investigative journalism by association.

(c) Systemic Reforms and Ethical Frameworks to Strengthen Responsible Journalism

To ensure balance between **press freedom and ethical responsibility**, the following reforms are essential:

1. Strengthening Self-Regulation Mechanisms

- Empower the **Press Council of India (PCI)** with more enforcement powers.
- Mandate **ombudsmen or editorial ethics committees** in all major news organizations.

2. Legal Codification of Media Ethics

- Draft a **Media Accountability Bill** to ensure adherence to:
 - Principles of fairness and accuracy
 - Presumption of innocence
 - Protection of privacy

3. Fact-Checking and Verification Protocols

- Require **mandatory fact-checking layers** and transparent sourcing for criminal or sensitive reporting.
- Penalize proven cases of misinformation or doctored content.

4. Prohibiting Pre-Trial Media Verdicts

- Introduce legal provisions restricting **public attribution of criminality** before formal charges or judicial findings.

5. Media Literacy Campaigns

- Empower viewers to critically assess media content through **public education** on media ethics and misinformation.

6. Protection of Individual Rights

- Strengthen privacy and defamation laws to provide swift recourse to victims of unethical reporting.

7. Promote Ethical Journalism Frameworks

- Adopt values from:
 - **Code of Ethics for Journalists (PCI)**
 - **UNESCO's Guidelines on Media Ethics**
 - **Virtue ethics**, focusing on *truthfulness, fairness, accountability, and harm minimization*

Conclusion

The case of Gunjan reflects a growing ethical deficit in some segments of Indian media, where **market incentives override constitutional values**. As an ethics advisor, the goal is not to curtail press freedom but to ensure it operates within **a framework of responsibility, justice, and human dignity**. Institutional reforms, legal protections, and cultural shifts in journalistic ethics are necessary to restore public faith in the media as a pillar of democracy.

Q.17) Avinash, a mid-level executive in City X, was returning home from work one evening when he noticed a young woman being verbally abused and physically assaulted by a man — presumably her boyfriend — at a quiet street corner. There was no one else around, and it was getting dark.

Avinash paused but quickly rationalized that it was a personal matter between two adults and chose not to intervene or call for help. He walked away quietly, not wanting to get “involved.”

The next day, Avinash casually recounted the incident to his colleagues during lunch, even laughing off how awkward he felt. However, one of his close friends, Rohit, grew visibly disturbed and said that the girl he was talking about was his sister. She was found unconscious later that night and is currently in the hospital with serious injuries.

Rohit accused Avinash of moral cowardice, saying that had he acted, his sister might have been saved from further harm. Avinash, however, insisted that he was not responsible, since he didn't know the people involved and had no obligation to interfere in others' affairs.

Questions:

- a) Identify and explain the ethical issues involved in Avinash's behaviour.
- b) Is Avinash morally responsible for the consequences of his inaction? Why or why not?
- c) What could be done at the societal and policy level to prevent such instances of public inaction during emergencies?

Introduction

This case highlights a classic example of the “**bystander effect**”, where individuals witnessing wrongdoing or harm choose inaction, often rationalizing it as neutrality. Avinash's failure to act during an evident case of assault raises deep ethical questions about **civic duty, moral courage, and societal apathy**.

Body

(a) Ethical Issues in Avinash's Behaviour

1. **Moral Cowardice and Apathy:** Avinash failed to demonstrate **moral courage** in a situation demanding intervention, choosing personal convenience over potential harm to another person.
2. **Failure of Civic Responsibility:** As a citizen, Avinash had a **moral duty** to respond—at the very least by informing authorities—especially when someone was at risk of violence.
3. **Dehumanization and Disrespect for Human Dignity:** Laughing about the incident later and treating it casually reflects a **lack of empathy** and **failure to acknowledge the victim's suffering**.
4. **Ethical Relativism / False Neutrality:** By labeling the violence as a “private matter,” Avinash ignored the fact that **abuse is a crime**, not a personal issue immune from public responsibility.

5. **Bystander Effect and Diffusion of Responsibility:** His inaction exemplifies a psychological phenomenon where individuals assume others will act, thereby **abdicated moral responsibility**.

(b) Is Avinash Morally Responsible for the Consequences of His Inaction?

Yes, **Avinash bears moral responsibility**, even if not legal culpability.

Reasoning:

1. **Foreseeability of Harm:** He witnessed **clear signs of physical abuse**. A reasonable person could foresee potential escalation, making non-intervention ethically negligent.
2. **Duty to Act:** While he had no legal obligation, **virtue ethics** and **social contract theory** both suggest a moral duty to act when others are in danger.
3. **Violation of Empathy and Compassion:** Ethical values such as **compassion, solidarity, and justice** require action to prevent harm, even toward strangers.
4. **Enabling Injustice Through Silence:** Inaction in the face of wrongdoing indirectly **enables the perpetrator**, making the bystander morally complicit in the outcome.

However, this responsibility must be weighed with **practical concerns**—fear of retaliation or personal safety. Still, **minimal intervention** (such as calling the police) was a safe and ethical course.

(c) Societal and Policy-Level Measures to Prevent Public Inaction

1. **Good Samaritan Laws Awareness:** Although India has laws protecting those who help accident or violence victims, **greater awareness and legal assurance** are needed to empower bystanders.
2. **Civic and Ethics Education:** Introduce **value-based education** in schools and colleges focusing on empathy, moral courage, and public responsibility.
3. **Community Policing and Anonymous Helplines:** Establish and publicize mechanisms for safe, anonymous reporting of crimes or violence.
4. **Media Campaigns on Moral Duty:** Public service messaging (as seen in traffic safety ads) can reshape norms around **bystander responsibility** and **civic ethics**.
5. **Public Recognition for Intervention:** Incentivize ethical behavior by **honouring citizens** who act responsibly during emergencies, thus reshaping public norms.
6. **Training in Safe Intervention:** Basic workshops on how to **respond safely**—calling authorities, alerting bystanders, or discreetly intervening—can reduce public hesitation.

Conclusion

Avinash's inaction was not simply a personal choice—it reflected a broader societal failure to instill **moral responsibility, empathy, and civic duty**. While not legally liable, he is ethically accountable for the harm that might have been prevented. To prevent future tragedies, a **cultural and institutional shift** is needed—toward **active citizenship**, supported by law, policy, and education.