

Edition: 2025

Mains Tattva:



The Craft of
Answer Writing

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Mains **GS Paper PYQs** with *Reference* **Answers & Pattern Analysis**



APSC CCE

| 2020

| 2022

| 2023

| 2024

+ With Similar PYQs in **UPSC CSE** (2013-2025)

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Advanced Studies

A Leading Civil Service Coaching Institute in Assam

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expression, and Assamese cultural identity. Its evolution from monastic ritual to global stage reflects Assam's deep civilisational resilience and the transformative legacy of Sankaradeva's humanistic spiritual vision.

Question: Highlight the major themes of the prehistoric paintings of India. (Write in 150 words) 10

APSC CCE 2020

- » **Introduction** - Briefly mention the timeline of the pre-historic period
- » **Body** -
- » Core demand - Major themes of prehistoric paintings with examples
- » Value Addition - India map showing different prehistoric sites
- » **Conclusion** - End with significance of the prehistoric paintings like UNESCO status

Reference Answer

Introduction

Prehistoric paintings in India date back to the Upper Paleolithic to Chalcolithic period (c. 30,000-1,000 BCE) which offer valuable insights into the early human relationship with nature, livelihood, and spirituality.

Body

Major Themes of Prehistoric Paintings -

1. **Hunting Scenes:** Depicting humans with bows, arrows, and spears hunting deer and bison. E.g. - Bhimbetka rock shelters.
2. **Dancing and Music:** Group dances and rhythmic scenes reflect social gatherings and rituals.
3. **Animal Figures:** Frequent portrayals of bison, elephants, tigers, and boars show admiration and dependence on wildlife. E.g. - Multiple legged lizards in Lakhudiyar caves
4. **Daily Life Activities:** Depictions of food gathering, child-rearing, and communal life indicate societal organization. E.g. Adichanallur paintings in Tamil Nadu
5. **Rituals and Supernatural Beliefs:** Figures wearing animal masks imply spiritual or shamanic practices. E.g. - Man holding trident in Bhimbetka
6. **Symbolic and Abstract Motifs:** Geometric shapes, spirals, and handprints reflect early symbolic expression. E.g. - Adamgarh motifs in Madhya Pradesh
7. **Gender Roles:** Women shown dancing or nurturing highlight their central role in social life.
8. **Raw materials** - Use of natural dyes like magnetite (red), chalk (white) for paintings.

Conclusion

Considering the significance of prehistoric rock arts, **Bhimbetka rock caves have been accorded UNESCO World Heritage Site** and continues to inspire contemporary art and paintings.

- » **Similar Questions** on the theme - Prehistoric Art and Architecture
- » Mesolithic rock cut architecture of India not only reflects the cultural life of the times but also a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting. Critically evaluate this comment. (UPSC CSE 2015)

Other important themes from APSC/ UPSC Perspective for upcoming APSC Mains

Vedic Period

- » Underline the changes in the field of society and economy from the Rig Vedic to the later Vedic period. **150 words, 10 marks.** [UPSC CSE 2024]
- » What are the main features of Vedic society and religion? Do you think some of the features are still prevailing in Indian society? **250 words, 15 marks.** [UPSC CSE 2023]
- » Indus Valley Civilization
- » Discuss the salient features of the Harappan architecture. **150 words, 10 marks.** [UPSC CSE 2025]
- » To what extent has the urban planning and culture of the Indus Valley Civilization provided inputs to the present-day urbanization? Discuss. [UPSC CSE 2014]
- » Chola Empire and the Southern Kingdoms
- » Though the great Cholas are no more yet their name is still remembered with great pride because of their highest achievements in the domain of art and architecture.” Comment. **250 words, 15 marks.** [UPSC CSE 2024]
- » Estimate the contribution of Pallavas of Kanchi for the development of art and literature of South India. **150 words, 10 marks.** [UPSC CSE 2024]
- » Krishnadeva Raya, the King of Vijayanagar, was not only an accomplished scholar himself but was also a great patron of learning and literature. Discuss. [UPSC CSE 2016]
- » Discuss the Tandava dance as recorded in the early Indian inscriptions. [UPSC CSE 2013]
- » Chola architecture represents a high watermark in the evolution of temple architecture. Discuss. [UPSC CSE 2013]

Gupta Period

- » Discuss the main contributions of Gupta period and Chola period to Indian heritage and culture. **250 Words, 15 Marks.** [UPSC CSE 2022]
- » How do you justify the view that the level of excellence of Gupta numismatic art is not at all noticeable in later times. [UPSC CSE 2017]
- » Indian Sculpture
- » The sculptors filled the Chandella artform with resilient vigor and breadth of life. Elucidate. **150 words, 10 marks.** [UPSC CSE 2025]

Theme – Basic Structure

Question: “The doctrine of basic structure safeguards the spirit of the Constitution against majoritarian impulses in India.” Examine the role of the judiciary in evolving the doctrine of basic structure of the Indian Constitution. (Write in 250 words) 15 marks.

APSC CCE 2024

» **Introduction** – Mention briefly about the origin of Basic Structure Doctrine

» **Body -**

- » Non-core demand: How doctrine of basic structure safeguards the spirit of the Constitution against majoritarian impulses in India
- » Role of Judiciary in evolving the doctrine of basic structure of the Indian Constitution
- » Since directive is ‘Examine’, mention few criticisms of the doctrine too

» **Way Forward** – with recommendations of various committees

» **Conclusion** – Conclude with a quote

Reference Answer**Introduction**

The Doctrine of Basic Structure originated from the landmark *Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala* (1973) case, where the Supreme Court ruled that Parliament’s power to amend the Constitution under Article 368 is not absolute. The doctrine ensures that the core principles of the Constitution, such as democracy, secularism, and rule of law, cannot be destroyed even by a constitutional amendment.

Body**Doctrine of Basic Structure safeguarding the Spirit of the Constitution**

1. **Checks majoritarianism:** Prevents the ruling majority from altering the Constitution’s democratic framework (*Kesavananda Bharati*, 1973).
2. **Protects fundamental rights:** Safeguards individual liberties against arbitrary state action (*Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain*, 1975).
3. **Ensures judicial independence:** Prevents dilution of judicial review (*Minerva Mills*, 1980).
4. **Maintains separation of powers:** Stops legislative overreach into judicial or executive domains (*I.R. Coelho v. State of Tamil Nadu*, 2007).
5. **Upholds federalism:** Reinforces the idea that India is a federation of states with sufficient state autonomy (*SR Bommai Case*, 1994).

Role of Judiciary in Evolving the Doctrine

1. **Shankari Prasad (1951) and Sajjan Singh (1965):** Court upheld unlimited

amending power of Parliament.

2. **Golaknath (1967):** Restricted Parliament from amending Fundamental Rights.
3. **Kesavananda Bharati (1973):** Introduced the *Basic Structure Doctrine* balancing Parliament's power with constitutional sanctity.
4. **Indira Gandhi v. Raj Narain (1975):** Applied the doctrine to strike down the 39th Amendment that sought to immunize PM's election from judicial review.
5. **Minerva Mills (1980):** Expanded the doctrine to include harmony between Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles.
6. **I.R. Coelho (2007):** Extended the doctrine's applicability even to laws placed under the Ninth Schedule.

Criticisms of the Doctrine

1. **Judicial overreach:** Unelected judges limiting the will of Parliament, with scholars calling it 'rewriting of the Constitution.'
2. **Ambiguity:** "Basic structure" remains undefined and subjective, depending on the bench of Judges
3. **Inconsistent application:** Courts have expanded its scope without clear parameters leading to judicial encroachment into executive and legislative domain.
4. **Democratic concern:** Critics argue it weakens representative sovereignty.

Way Forward

1. Codification of the Basic Structure Doctrine to reduce ambiguity, as done by Germany.
2. Parliament–Judiciary dialogue for harmonious interpretation.
3. Adoption of recommendations of the NCRWC (2002) for clearer constitutional limits. E.g. - Recommended that amendments affecting federal structure, judicial independence, or fundamental rights should undergo wider consultation—including approval by at least half the states or a national referendum.
4. Balanced judicial restraint to avoid excessive interference in policy matters.

Conclusion

Basic Structure Doctrine is a testimony to the 'living nature' of the Constitution that has time and again protected the citizens from majoritarian impulses. As said by ex-CJI Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, "*Basic Structure Doctrine serve as the North Pole that guides the implementers of the Constitution.*"

Similar Questions

- » What do you mean by the 'basic structure' of the Constitution of India? Discuss the different views around it in the light of the recommendations of the 'National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution'. [APSC CCE 2022]
- » Explain the procedure to amend the Constitution of India highlighting the significance of the basic structure doctrine. [APSC CCE 2020]

in refineries, fertilisers, steel, shipping, and heavy industries, reducing carbon emissions.

- **Financial support mechanisms:** Introduction of Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) programme to provide incentives for electrolyser manufacturing and hydrogen production.
- **Domestic manufacturing ecosystem:** Encourages indigenous manufacturing of electrolysers, reducing import dependence and boosting *Atmanirbhar Bharat*.
- **Export and global leadership:** Positions India as a competitive exporter of green hydrogen and derivatives like green ammonia.
- **Employment and innovation:** Expected to generate over 6 lakh jobs and stimulate research, innovation, and skill development.

Conclusion

The National Green Hydrogen Mission is a cornerstone of India's **net-zero strategy by 2070**, enabling clean energy transition, industrial decarbonisation, and long-term energy security.

Topic: Farm subsidies and MSP and issues therein

Theme - Public Distribution systems

Question: What are the objectives and components of Public Distribution System (PDS) in India? Give an account of implementation of PDS in the country (Write in 150 words) 10 marks.

APSC CCE 2024

- » **Introduction** – State what PDS is and its purpose
- » **Body** – list objectives → explain components → briefly assess implementation with reforms and challenges
- » **Conclusion** – conclude on its role in food security.

Reference Answer

Introduction

The **Public Distribution System (PDS)** is a key food security mechanism aimed at ensuring **affordable access to essential foodgrains** for vulnerable sections of society.

Body

Objectives of PDS:

- Ensure **food security** for the poor and disadvantaged.
- Stabilise prices of essential commodities.
- Prevent hunger and malnutrition, especially during shocks like droughts or pandemics.

Components of PDS:

- **Procurement:** Foodgrains procured by the **Food Corporation of India**

- (FCI) at Minimum Support Price.
- **Storage and transportation:** Warehousing and movement of grains across states.
- **Allocation:** Distribution to states under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013**.
- **Fair Price Shops (FPS):** Last-mile delivery to beneficiaries.

Implementation of PDS:

- Under NFSA, about **81 crore beneficiaries** receive subsidised rice and wheat.
- Reforms like **Aadhaar seeding, e-PoS machines, and One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)** have improved transparency and portability.
- However, challenges such as **leakages, exclusion errors, and uneven state capacity** persist.

Conclusion

A reformed and technology-enabled PDS remains central to **India's food security and social protection framework**.

Question: What is meant by food security? What are its dimensions? Examine the role of the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) in ensuring food security in India. (Write in 250 words) 15 marks.

APSC CCE 2024

- » **Introduction** – Briefly introduce NFSM
- » **Body** – explain its contributions to food security with data and examples → identify key gaps and constraints → suggest a focused way forward
- » **Conclusion** – conclude on strengthening availability, stability, and nutrition.

Reference Answer

Introduction

Food security exists when **all people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food** to meet dietary needs for an active and healthy life (FAO).

Body

Dimensions of food security:

1. **Availability:** Adequate production and supply of food through domestic output, stocks, and imports.
2. **Accessibility:** People's ability to obtain food through income, markets, and public distribution.
3. **Utilisation:** Proper biological use of food, ensured by nutrition, clean water, sanitation, and health care.
4. **Stability:** Sustained access to food over time without disruption due to shocks like droughts, floods, or pandemics.

How NFSM has helped:

- **Productivity and output gains:** Launched in 2007, NFSM covers **rice, wheat, pulses, coarse cereals and nutri-cereals**. India's foodgrain production rose from **~217 million tonnes (2006–07)** to **330+ million**

tonnes (2022–23), with NFSM interventions contributing through improved seeds, demonstrations, and mechanisation.

- **Pulses turnaround:** Focused support helped India become the **largest producer of pulses**, reducing import dependence and improving protein availability.
- **Diversification & nutrition:** Inclusion of **millets (nutri-cereals)** aligns with nutrition security and climate resilience (e.g., millet promotion in rainfed regions).
- **Regional balance:** Targeting **rainfed and low-productivity districts** improved stability in vulnerable areas.

Issues and constraints:

- **Uneven state performance:** Yield gains vary due to irrigation gaps and extension capacity.
- **Input-heavy bias:** Insufficient integration of **soil health, water-use efficiency**, and climate-smart practices in some pockets.
- **Market linkage gaps:** Productivity gains not always matched by **assured procurement/price realisation**.
- **Monitoring challenges:** Outcome tracking and last-mile adoption remain inconsistent.

Way forward:

- Integrate **climate-smart agriculture**, micro-irrigation, and soil health cards.
- Strengthen **extension, digital advisories, and FPO-market linkages**.
- Align NFSM with **procurement reforms, value chains, and nutrition goals**.
- Improve **outcome-based monitoring** and state capacity.

Conclusion

NFSM has strengthened **availability and stability** of food; deeper sustainability, markets and climate integration will enhance its food security impact.

Similar questions

- » What are the challenges in the proper functioning of the Public Distribution System? How is the government responding to these challenges? **250 words 15 marks**[APSC CCE 2022]
- » What are the major challenges of Public Distribution System (PDS) in India? How can it be made effective and transparent? **150 word 10 marks** [UPSC CSE 2022].
- » Food security bill is expected to eliminate hunger and malnutrition in India. Critically discuss various apprehensions in its effective implementation along with the concerns it has generated in WTO. [UPSC CSE 2013]

Question: Increased national wealth need not mean increase in the per capita incomes of all the citizens. Equitable distribution of wealth is till distant dream in India. There are pockets of minority wealthy families to whom concentration of wealth occur. Majority of people are still without basic necessities of life. Critically analyse the above statement in the context of contemporary Indian Economy and Society. (Write in 250 words) 20 Marks

APSC 2020

Reference Answer

This statement highlights the ethical crisis of “**Growth without Equity**” in India. To solve this as a case study, we must treat the Indian economy as the subject and analyze the ethical disconnect between wealth creation (GDP) and human well-being (HDI).

1. Subject of the Case

The case concerns the **distributive injustice** within the Indian economy, where high national growth (5th largest GDP) coexists with widening inequality and deprivation of basic needs for the majority.

2. Stakeholders Involved

- **The “Pockets of Wealth” (The Elite/Top 1%):** Beneficiaries of the K-shaped recovery.
- **The Deprived Majority (Bottom 50%):** Daily wagers, farmers, informal sector workers lacking basic necessities.
- **The State (Government):** Constitutionally mandated to ensure a welfare state (DPSP Article 38 & 39).
- **Civil Society:** NGOs and activists advocating for rights.

3. Ethical Issues and Dilemmas

- Utilitarianism vs. Antyodaya:
 - **Dilemma:** Does a rising GDP justify the suffering of the poor?
 - **Analysis:** Utilitarianism seeks the “greatest happiness,” but in India, the happiness is concentrated. As per the **World Inequality Report**, the top 1% holds **40.1%** of national wealth, while the bottom 50% holds just **6.4%**. This violates the principle of “Greatest Good for the Greatest Number.”
- Crony Capitalism vs. Fair Opportunity:
 - **Issue:** Wealth concentration often stems from proximity to power rather than pure innovation.
 - **Ethical Violation:** This creates an “Oligarchy” where economic power translates to political influence, undermining the democratic principle of “One Person, One Vote, One Value.”
- Right to Property vs. Right to Life (Article 21):
 - **Conflict:** The affluent claim a right to their earnings, while the poor claim a right to basic existence (food, shelter, health).
 - **Resolution:** In a welfare state, the Right to Life takes precedence. Wealth accumulation that starves the public exchequer of funds

needed for public health/education is unethical.

4. Ethical Frameworks Applied

- **John Rawls' Theory of Justice (Distributive Justice):** Rawls argues for the “**Difference Principle**”: Inequality is acceptable *only if* it benefits the least advantaged members of society.

Application: In India, the wealth of the top 1% is *not* trickling down effectively to the bottom 50%. Therefore, the current economic structure is **unjust** according to Rawls.

- **Mahatma Gandhi's Concept of “Trusteeship”:** Gandhi argued that the rich should act as “Trustees” of their wealth, using it for social good rather than personal indulgence.

Application: The conspicuous consumption by the elite while millions suffer from malnutrition (India ranks **105th in Global Hunger Index 2024**) indicates a failure of this moral duty.

- **Amartya Sen's Capability Approach:** Development is not just GDP growth but the expansion of human freedoms (capabilities).

Application: If a citizen cannot afford healthcare or education, they are not “free,” regardless of the nation's GDP.

5. Critical Analysis of the Situation

The statement is factually and ethically accurate in the contemporary context:

- **Jobless Growth:** The sectors driving wealth (IT, Finance) are capital-intensive, not labor-intensive. This creates “Islands of Prosperity” in an “Ocean of Poverty.”
- **Regressive Burden:** The reliance on indirect taxes (GST) means a poor laborer pays the same tax on essential goods as a billionaire, violating the canon of equity.
- **Intergenerational Inequity:** Wealth concentration leads to unequal access to education. The child of a wealthy family gets elite schooling, while the poor child gets substandard education, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

6. Course of Action (Way Forward)

To resolve this ethical crisis, the State must move from “Trickle-Down” to “Bottom-Up” economics:

- **Progressive Taxation:** Re-evaluating wealth tax or inheritance tax (Estate Duty) to fund public infrastructure, ensuring the wealthy contribute their fair share.
- **Universal Basic Services (UBS):** Instead of just cash handouts, the state must guarantee quality public health and education. This levels the playing field (Equality of Opportunity).
- **Strengthening MSMEs:** Shifting policy focus from giant conglomerates to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which employ the vast majority of the workforce.
- **Social Audit & Transparency:** curbing “cronyism” by ensuring transparency in resource allocation (auctions vs. nominations) to prevent the monopolization of national assets.

As per the **Preamble of the Constitution**, India aims for “Justice: Social, Economic, and Political.” Until the gap between the “pockets of wealth” and the

native fishes for food, shelter, and breeding sites, potentially leading to the extinction of indigenous species and altering the stability of the aquatic ecosystem.

Economic and Public Health Consequences

- **Agricultural Loss:** Non-native weeds act as harmful weeds in crop fields, reducing agricultural productivity and degrading livestock foraging areas.
- **Infrastructure Damage:** Aquatic species like Water Hyacinth obstruct drainage systems and clog feeder channels, exacerbating flood risks in the Brahmaputra floodplains.
- **Public Health Hazards:** Certain invaders, such as *Parthenium hysterophorus*, are linked to public health hazards in both humans and animals due to their toxic or allergenic nature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Invasive Alien Species represent a profound environmental, economic, and health challenge to Assam, demanding urgent control and management strategies to safeguard the region's endemic biodiversity.

Question: What is a time zone? Is there any need to have a separate time zone for Assam? What could be the merits and demerits to have a separate time zone for Assam? (Write in 150 words) 10 marks.

APSC CCE 2024

- » **Introduction** – Briefly describe the Time Zone concept
- » **Body** –need for Assam Time Zone, also include Chaibagan time zone
- » **Conclusion**–Suggestion by Assam government

Reference Answer

Introduction

A **Time Zone** is an area of the Earth that adheres to a uniform standard time, typically defined by a specific longitudinal region where the clock time is synchronized. Time zones are typically measured by their offset (difference in hours and minutes) from **Coordinated Universal Time (UTC)**, which serves as the global reference point. India officially follows a single time zone, the **Indian Standard Time (IST)**, set at **UTC + 5:30**, calculated based on the mean time of the 82°30'E longitude passing near Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh.

Body

The Need for a Separate Time Zone for Assam

- The demand for a separate time zone, often referred to as a **North East Standard Time (NEST)**, is a persistent and practical necessity for Assam and the entire Northeast region.
- India spans a longitudinal range of nearly 30 degrees (from 68°7'E to 97°25'E), resulting in a natural time difference of almost **two hours** between the far east and the far west. Assam, lying in the extreme east, experiences sunrise as early as **4:00 AM IST** in the summer and sunset as early as **4:00 PM IST** in the winter.
- Since official working hours (e.g., government offices, educational

institutions) are fixed according to IST, a large number of productive daylight hours are **wasted** in the morning before offices open. Conversely, people are forced to rely on artificial lighting much earlier in the evening, as the sun sets rapidly after 4:00 PM in winter. This mismatch creates inefficiency, reduced productivity, and increased energy consumption.

The Chaibagaan Time Zone Concept

- The concept of a separate time zone is historically validated by the **Chaibagaan Time** (Tea Garden Time).
 - **Origin and Definition:** Introduced by the British colonialists over 150 years ago for the **tea estates, collieries, and oil industries** of Assam, Chaibagaan Time is informally set **one hour ahead of IST** (effectively UTC + 6:30).
 - **Purpose:** This practice was introduced specifically to **better utilize the early sunlight** and maximize labour efficiency in the sunlight-dependent tea plantations.
 - **Significance:** The continued, albeit informal, adherence to Chaibagaan Time by the tea industry strongly demonstrates the practical and economic suitability of an advanced time zone for Assam's geography.

Merits and Demerits of a Separate Time Zone for Assam (IST-II)

Proposals, often backed by scientific bodies like CSIR-NPL, suggest creating IST-II (UTC + 6:30) for the Northeast.

A. Merits (Arguments for IST-II)

- **Increased Efficiency and Productivity:** Aligning the official clock with the local solar cycle maximizes the use of early daylight hours, adhering to the body's natural **circadian rhythm**. This is projected to increase work output, as demonstrated by the tea industry's practice.
- **Significant Energy Conservation:** Utilizing natural daylight for a longer part of the workday reduces the reliance on artificial lighting in the morning and evening. Studies suggest advancing IST by half an hour could save the nation billions of electricity units annually.
- **Economic Benefit:** Improved workforce efficiency and reduced energy costs directly benefit the economy. Research indicates that adjusting time could contribute to increasing Assam's **Net State Domestic Product (NSDP)** by boosting work hours.
- **Social Well-being:** More daylight in the evening allows for better recreational avenues and improved women's safety.

B. Demerits (Arguments Against IST-II)

- **Logistical Chaos and Safety Risks:** The primary objection raised by the Central Government and committees is the potential for **chaos and confusion in the transport sector**, particularly the **railways**. With signaling systems not fully automated, dual time zones could increase the risk of accidents.
- **Administrative and Business Disruption:** A separate time zone would reduce the overlapping window for coordinating between Central Government offices, banks, and businesses in Assam and the rest of the country, potentially slowing down national administrative efficiency.
- **National Integration and Strategic Concerns:** The idea has been repeatedly rejected by the Central Government on "**strategic reasons**".

Mains Tattva:



The Craft of
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