Approach : UPSC Civil Services (Mains) Exam Essay - 2025

*Write **two** essays, choosing **one** topic from each of the following Sections A and B, in about 1000-120**0** words each:*

125 x 2 = 250

SECTION – A

1.   *Truth knows no color.*

Approach:

Introduction: Begin with a strong anecdote

In 1893, a young **_Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi_** was forcibly removed from a first-class railway compartment at Pietermaritzburg in South Africa due to the color of his skin. Humiliated, he spent the cold night on the station platform, but out of that darkness arose a light that would guide not only India but the whole world.

Gandhi realized that **_prejudice may see color, but truth does not._** Injustice was not a natural law but a human distortion of truth. That night became the seed of his philosophy of **_satyagraha, or the "force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence._** *It* drew its strength from universality and moral courage rather than race, religion, or caste. It was a turning point that revealed that **_truth, unlike men, does not discriminate._**

Expand the meaning of the topic: The adage **_"Truth Has No Colour"_** means that truth is universal and not affected by human-made distinctions of race, caste, creed, or gender.

Body:

The objectivity of truth can be seen in different dimensions:

- **Philosophical:** **_"Satyamev Jayate" (Upanishads) and Kant's categorical imperatives_** affirm truth as universal, transcending race. **_Satyagraha_** embodies this by uniting diverse groups under moral truth.
- **Historical parallels: Civil Rights Movement (US)**: **_Martin Luther King Jr. → "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."_**
- **Scientific:** Laws of nature are universal, like **_gravity,_** the workings of **_DNA_**, and **_quantum physics_** work for all.

Distortion of truth:

- **Individuals:** Each person sees truth through the "lens" of their **_upbringing, ideology, or self-interest._** **_Confirmation bias_** also prevails.
- **Authoritarian regimes** often manipulate truth to consolidate control. **_For example, Nazi Germany._**
- **Media:** **_Post-truth politics_** thrives where emotional appeal overtakes facts.
- **Institutions:** Corporations sometimes distort the truth for profit. Advertisements sell **_illusions instead of facts._**

Why do these biases persist?

- **History:** _Caste_ in India, colonial _**Divide and Rule**_ policy, _**racial segregation**_ in the USA
- **Power and privilege:** tied to the identity of those who are privileged
- **Economic interests of people:** cheap labor, gendered pay gap, etc.
- **Social conditioning:** _**"Othering"**_ is psychologically easier than embracing diversity.

Who upholds the truth:

- **Leaders:** Gandhi ji, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr.
- **Constitution:** _Right to Equality (Article 14–18)_ reflects the idea that truth has no color, caste, or creed.
- **Courts**
- **Individuals and their values:** love, honesty, fraternity

Solutions to ensure truth prevails over bias:

- **Education and awareness:** Critical thinking in schools, value-based education, etc.
- **Legal and institutional safeguards:** Independent judiciary, free press, protection to whistleblowers, etc.
- **Technology & Media Responsibility:** Fact-checking and algorithmic accountability on social media, digital literacy, etc.

Briefly highlight the counterview:

- Some might argue that truth is subjective, shaped by cultural or racial perspectives, making universal truth elusive.

Conclusion:

Reaffirm the idea that truth is supreme and knows no colors by a quote of _"Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth."_ – **Buddha**

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2. _**The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.**_

Approach:

Introduction:

True mastery in strategy achieves objectives by altering an adversary's incentives and perceptions so that conflict becomes irrational. The toolkit is **deterrence, diplomacy, law/institutions, economic statecraft, coalitions, and information advantage**.

Body:

- **Economic/legal statecraft:** Control over finance, technology, and rules can compel behaviour change.
  - _E.g. **JCPOA (2015):** Multilateral sanctions and inspections capped Iran's programme without kinetic strikes for over a decade._
- **Soft power & normative pull:** Preferences shift when joining your order is more rewarding than resisting it.
  - _E.g. **Brain drain from East** pushes talent (students, scientists, nurses, engineers) into Western hubs. Thus preferences and capabilities realign without coercion._
- **Psychological hegemony of limited choice:** Shape perceptions, reputational stakes, and timelines so the opponent faces a "Hobson's choice" where every visible path makes defiance costlier than compliance.

- o *E.g. **India's princely integration (1947–49):** Delhi made accession the only rational, face-saving choice for most princely states.*
- **Conflict de-escalation via accords:** Address grievances to dry up recruitment and need for force.
  - o *E.g. **Bodo Accord (2020):** Autonomy and development packages facilitated demobilisation and reduced violence without decisive battles.*
- **Deterrence with off-ramps:** Maintain credible capability while offering negotiated exits to reshape the opponent's calculus.
  - o *E.g. **Cuban Missile Crisis (1962):** Naval "quarantine" + backchannels (Jupiter trade) compelled withdrawal without war.*

Anti-Thesis

- **Risks of "no-fight" strategies:** Over-concession can embolden, grey-zone coercion exploits restraint and sanctions may backfire.
  - o *E.g. **Munich (1938):** Concessions failed to deter further aggression, showing credibility must accompany diplomacy.*

Conclusion:

The highest strategy wins before battle by **shaping incentives, narratives, and alignments** so the adversary chooses your outcome. A smart mix of **credible power, rules, and persuasion** secures durable gains with minimal cost.

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3. *Thought finds a world and creates one also.*

Approach:

Introduction:

- Begin by explaining that *thought **is both discovery and invention***. A human mind perceives reality around it and interprets it ("finds a world"), but it also **imagines, innovates, and constructs** new realities ("creates one also"). Thought is the bridge between what exists and what can exist.
- Example of Wright brothers. Their thought began with observing how birds fly (finding a world), then converting imagination into the first airplane (creating a world).

Body:

1. **Thought finds a world**: Our thinking helps uncover realities that pre-exist us.
   - Archaeologists and historians **reconstruct** the ancient world through thought.
   - Newton observing an apple fall and **"finding"** the world of gravity already present.
   - Early explorers mapped lands and seas not **"new"** in existence, but new in human understanding.
   - Philosophers "find" moral principles underlying human life (e.g., Upanishadic Rishis discovering spiritual truths).
2. **Thought creates a world:** Imagination actively builds new structures and institutions.
   - Constitutional makers created democratic systems that did not exist before.
   - Industrial revolution—machines, factories, capitalism were products of human design.
   - Space travel, internet—new realities brought into being.
   - Reform movements created new worlds of equality and rights.
   - Institutions like UN, EU emerged from the creative thought of avoiding wars.

3. **Link between discovery and creation:**
   - Every discovery integrates into new creations. Once Newton "found" gravity, Einstein and space scientists **"created"** spacecrafts based on it. Thought thus works as both lens of exploration and chisel of creation.
4. **Challenges:**
   - Just as thought can create life-enhancing innovations, it can also create destructive forces. E.g. nuclear weapons
   - Scientific discoveries (AI, biotechnology, genetic engineering) raises questions about privacy, equity, and morality.
   - Human thought has given birth to ideologies like fascism, fanaticism, or colonialism.
5. **Way Forward:**
   - Encourage **critical, ethical and sustainable thinking**.
   - Thought today must not only create technological marvels but also **ensure balance with environment, equity in society, and peace among nations**.
   - Education should nurture both **analytical (finding truth)** and **creative (imagining possibilities)** faculties.

Conclusion:

- Just like the Wright brothers' idea gave humanity wings but also new responsibility (aviation's effect on climate, geopolitics, commerce), our creations must be tied with responsibility.
- Conclude by reaffirming that thought is both **mirror and lamp**: it reflects what already exists and illuminates pathways into new worlds.
- Humanity progresses by harmonizing discovery with responsible creation.

"The mind is everything. What you think you become." – Buddha

4. *Best lessons are learnt through bitter experiences.*

Approach:

Introduction:

Human growth is rarely linear; it is forged in the crucible of challenges. **Stoicism** teaches that hardship is the greatest teacher of virtue and self-control. While pleasant experiences offer comfort, it is often the **bitter experiences of failure, loss, or adversity that leave the deepest impressions** and impart the most enduring lessons.

Body:

Why Bitter Experiences Teach Best

- **Reality Check** – Bitter experiences expose harsh truths, breaking illusions and compelling individuals or societies to confront reality.
  - *E.g., **Millions of deaths and destruction during WWI and WWII** taught nations the necessity of global institutions like the UN, Bretton Woods institutions.*
- **Resilience and Strength** – Adversity nurtures resilience, forcing people to adapt and emerge stronger.
  - *E.g., **Gandhi's experience with racial discrimination in South Africa** transformed him into a leader of non-violent resistance.*
- **Moral and Ethical Insights** – Suffering develops empathy, humility, and ethical maturity.
  - *E.g., **Nelson Mandela's years in prison** deepened his belief in reconciliation rather than revenge.*

- **Course Correction** – Failures highlight mistakes and force innovation and self-improvement.
  - *E.g., __India's defeat in the 1962 war with China__ led to critical military reforms and modernization.*
- **Driving Innovation and Change**: Hardships often spur innovation to solve problems.
  - E.g., __High pollution problem in India led to green crackers, beeh patakhas etc.__

Limitations of Learning Through Bitter Experiences

- **Emotional Toll**: Bitter experiences can lead to trauma or despair, hindering learning if not processed constructively.
  - *E.g., __prolonged colonial oppression risked fostering apathy__ among some Indians, though leaders channeled it into resistance.*
- **Not Universal**: Some learn better through positive reinforcement or mentorship.
  - *E.g., __ISRO built on incremental achievements__ rather than failures.*
- **Risk of Repetition**: Without reflection, bitter experiences may lead to repeated mistakes
  - *E.g., Despite the trauma of Partition (1947), __repeated communal riots__ show failure to fully internalize lessons on harmony and preventive governance.*

While bitter experiences are powerful teachers, **combining them with positive learning—through education, mentorship, or successes**—creates a holistic growth framework.

Conclusion:

Bitter experiences act as the **hard school of life**, leaving indelible lessons. Even Indian philosophy rooted in the **Bhagavad Gita** emphasizes struggle and suffering as pathways to wisdom and self-realization. As the saying goes, *"Smooth seas do not make skillful sailors."*

SECTION – B

5. *Muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone.*

Approach:

Introduction:

Meaning of the Topic:

- The metaphor of muddy water conveys **states of confusion, discord, or chaos**. The quote conveys the wisdom that in situations of muddy water **patience, calm reflection and non-interference** often resolve matters better than forceful intervention. It is a **metaphor for life, governance, society, and even nature** sometimes non-action is the best action.

Anecdotes

- In the **Bhagavad Gita**, Krishna advises Arjuna to rise above momentary delusion (moha). His confusion clears only when he pauses to reflect rather than rushing into blind action.
- In **Cold War diplomacy**, the Cuban Missile Crisis was resolved not by rash escalation but by restrained negotiation, where both the US and USSR allowed tempers to cool before acting.

Body:

- **Relevance form History:** The power of restraint has transformed societies.
  - **E.g** *Gandhi's non-violent satyagraha was not passivity, but a deliberate strategy of waiting, enduring, and letting injustice reveal itself.*

- **Relevance in Personal Life:** Acting in haste during anger or stress worsens conflicts.
  - E.g. *Psychologist **Daniel Goleman's** research shows that individuals who pause during emotional distress make better decisions.*
- **Society & Community Life:** Societal conflicts often intensify via rash interventions; dialogue & time mellow disputes.
  - *E.g. **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa** (post-apartheid) allowed collective healing by engaging patiently in truth-sharing instead of instant punitive purges.*
- **International Diplomacy**: Aggressive interventions often backfire; restraint avoids escalation.
  - Eg. *The **US invasion of Iraq** (2003), justified by hasty claims of WMDs, destabilized the region.*
- **Environment & Ecology**: Nature heals when left undisturbed.
  - Eg. ***During COVID-19 lockdowns**, pollution levels dropped drastically worldwide, showing how ecosystems regenerate when human activity pauses.*
- **Sports & Performance**: Athletes succeed by conserving energy and composure rather than panicking.
  - Eg. *MS Dhoni's calm approach under pressure, "finishing games".*

Counter-view: When Leaving It Alone is Dangerous

- **Genocide and Human Rights:** Leaving the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar "alone" led to ethnic cleansing.
- **Climate Change**: Waiting for nature to "clear" pollution is catastrophic. The IPCC warns that only aggressive intervention renewable energy, carbon taxes can avert disaster.
- **International**: Appeasement in 1930s Europe (Munich Agreement) showed that not confronting Hitler early enabled greater catastrophe.

Conclusion:

- True leadership and wisdom lie in discerning the difference between problems that need deliberate patience and those demanding decisive action. In life, societies, governance, or global order, oftentimes like muddy water confusion settles best when left to the quiet force of time.

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6. *The years teach much which the days never know.*

Approach:

Introduction:

To deconstruct this quote, we can break it down into its key elements:

- **The days:** Represent short-lived experiences and immediate challenges. They are **fleeting moments** that pass quickly, offering **instant lessons** that may be limited in perspective.
- **The years:** Symbolize the accumulation of time, **gradual growth**, and the insights that come with reflection over a longer period. It is through the years that **true wisdom emerges**, shaped by a series of experiences.

The quote emphasizes that while the days bring immediate lessons, it is the long passage of years that allows for reflection, learning from past mistakes, and developing a greater understanding of the complexities of life.

Body:

This essay can be explored through multiple dimensions, such as:

- **Personal growth over time:** Just as the years accumulate and bring greater wisdom, personal growth is often a result of continuous learning, reflection, resilience and adaptation.

- o *E.g., Albert Einstein struggled in his early years with doubts about his abilities and faced many setbacks. It was through **years of persistence, reflection, and study** that he developed the theories that transformed physics.*
- **Impact of reflection:** Unlike the fast-paced days that may rush by, the years allow us to pause, reflect, and make sense of our past experiences, which often leads to significant personal and intellectual growth.
  - o *E.g., Mahatma Gandhi's journey, shaped by years of struggle and reflection in South Africa, led to the development of **non-violence**, a principle that became clear to him after years of leadership and personal growth.*
- **Value of patience and learning:** While individual days might bring new challenges, it is only through years of persistence that we truly learn to master skills, relationships, and our own character.
  - o E.g., *A musician's ability to master an instrument does not come from a single practice session but from **years of consistent effort, practice, and learning** from mistakes.*
- **Philosophical insight:** Philosophers argue that true wisdom is the product of years of reflection and experience. It is not enough to rely on immediate moments; instead, over time, we learn to see life's deeper truths.
  - o *E.g., Immanuel Kant developed his theory of transcendental idealism over decades. Initially focusing on human perception, he gradually expanded his views on knowledge, morality, and reality, showing that **wisdom evolves through continuous thought and experience**.*

Conclusion:

The quote emphasizes that time, not just moments, shapes our understanding of life. While days offer immediate lessons, true wisdom comes through years of growth, reflection, and experience.

7. ***It is best to see life as a journey, not as a destination.***

Approach:

Introduction:

Human beings have an innate tendency to set goals, chase milestones, and measure success in definitive outcomes. Yet, life rarely unfolds as a linear race from point A to point B. To see life merely as a destination is to deny the richness of experiences that shape us along the way. Seeing life as a journey instead of a destination is not merely a philosophical proposition; it forms the very foundation of how individuals, societies, and nations progress.

Body:

- **Does chasing only the destination make us happier, or does enjoying the journey bring fulfillment**?
  - o Modern psychology and lived experience suggest that tying happiness to outcomes can lead to **anxiety and disappointment**.
  - o For instance, **UPSC aspirants** who view their preparation solely as a means to becoming an IAS officer often face distress if they fall short. Instead, those who cherish the academic process and personal growth find satisfaction regardless of results, proving that joy comes from the journey, not just the endpoint.
- **How does culture and tradition in India celebrate the journey?**
  - o Indian culture has historically glorified journeys. The **Char Dham Yatra, Kanwar Yatra, etc**. are not just about reaching temples but about endurance, devotion, and shared experiences.
  - o Even Indian cinema, from **Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara** to **Swades** celebrates journeys of self-discovery rather than destinations.

- **Are national achievements only about final targets, or about the continuous process?**
  - The success of the _**Green Revolution**_ was not a single event but the culmination of decades of research, policy reforms, and farmer collaboration.
  - Today, _**Digital India**_ is a journey, enhancing digital literacy, connectivity, and innovation, not just a final technological milestone.
- **Is character built by achieving external success, or by the continuous journey of self-improvement?**
  - Ethical living, involving values like honesty, resilience, and compassion, is shaped by daily choices, reinforcing that life's meaning lies in the journey of constant growth, not just in arriving somewhere.
  - _E.g., **Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's** life shows that greatness emerges not from reaching the position of President, but from years of learning, effort, and contribution._
- **Was India's freedom about the single day of independence, or the decades-long struggle?**
  - The Indian freedom struggle built civic consciousness and a united identity over long years, through Satyagraha and reform movements.
  - The journey itself, marked by the sacrifices, resilience, and moral assertion of countless Indians, was as transformative as 15th August 1947.
- **Isn't life meant to be about achieving our ultimate goals?**
  - Indian philosophy, as depicted in the Mahabharata, Ramayana, etc. encourages us to value the act of living and learning rather than just reaching an end.
  - _E.g., the **Bhagavad Gita** emphasizes **Nishkama Karma**, i.e., performing one's duties without obsessing over results._
  - This aligns with the idea that meaning lies in the path we tread, not just in the final achievement.

Conclusion:

Seeing life as a journey allows us to appreciate learning, growth, and ethical living at every stage. India's spiritual traditions, cultural practices, economic progress, and political history all underline that destinations are fleeting, but journeys shape individuals and societies.

As **Mahatma Gandhi** observed, "_**Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment; full effort is full victory.**_" Thus, life is not a race to a finish line, but a meaningful voyage of experiences and growth.

8. _Contentment is natural wealth; luxury is artificial poverty._

Approach:

Introduction:

- Student can start by explaining the quote (one's own understanding of the quote). Can also use Socrates quote - _He is richest who is content with the least, for content is the wealth of nature._
- Make a contrast between **contentment vs. luxury**:
  - Contentment → inner fulfilment, sustainable happiness.
  - Luxury → endless craving, relative deprivation.

Body: In the body following dimensions can be explored:

A. Philosophical dimension:
- Ancient philosophy (Stoics, Indian thought – **Buddha's "Desire is the root of suffering"**).
- **Gandhian ethics**: "The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed."
- Luxury equated with dependence on external possessions, which is fragile.

B. **Psychological dimension:**
- Contentment leads to mental peace, resilience, gratitude, balance.
- Luxury often creates **hedonic cycle**: desire → possession → dissatisfaction → desire again.
- **Case study:** Minimalism movements vs. consumerist culture.

C. **Societal Dimension**
- Contentment fosters equity, harmony, and sustainability.
- Luxury-based societies breed **conspicuous consumption** (Veblen), widening **inequality** and creating **artificial poverty** among those who feel deprived in comparison.
- **Example:** Rural communities with modest means yet strong well-being vs. urban consumerism and stress.

D. **Economic Dimension**
- Luxury → **artificial scarcity;** resources diverted to **vanity consumption** rather than **human development.**
- Contentment aligns with **sustainable development,** frugality, and responsible growth.
- E.g.: Small farmers in **Japan's Satoyama model vs. modern overconsumption lifestyles.**

E. **Environmental dimension**
- **Contentment =** sustainable use of nature's wealth, living in harmony**.**
- **Luxury = over-extraction,** climate change, **ecological poverty.**
- UN SDGs emphasis on **responsible consumption** and production.

F. **Counter arguments:**
- Luxury also drives **innovation, economic growth, better living standards**.

Conclusion:

- True wealth is measured not by possessions but by **freedom from endless want**.
- Contentment is **everlasting natural wealth**, while luxury without balance creates **emptiness and artificial poverty**.
- End with a thought: "In seeking less, we become more."