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Overall Macro Comments / feedback / suggestions on Answer Booklet:

1.

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All the Best

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Gender equality: A precondition for poverty reduction, sustainable development, and good governance in India

Scene 1 Anupama was an educated woman. She had a job which added to family income. Being empowered, she paid immense attention to family health, especially children. Her children received good education. She lay special focus on child's health by giving them nutritious food, regular health checkups. As a result, Anupama not only contributed to economy but also to sustainable development. Later, in old age, she fought her village elections and became a sarpanch. Being educated herself, she initiated a host of reforms like building toilets, improving villagers' nutrition level etc. Hence she further contributed to achieving SDGs through good governance.

Scene 2 Roni was a housewife in a remote Marayona village. Her education was neglected. She faced inequality at every stage of life, be it education, health, independent decision making etc. As a result, despite aiming to contribute to nation building since childhood by

becoming a cruel servant, her situation didn't allow her. She became a victim of gender inequality!

The above story presents a contrast, as to how an empowered women contributes to poverty reduction, sustainable development and good governance, while a women facing inequalities fail to do so. In other words, gender inequality is in a sense, an opportunity lost. "Women are the most important untapped reservoir in the world", and gender inequality is the major reason for the same.

Gender inequality: A troublesome scenario

Gender inequality is prevalent in various stages and in various forms. For example, women suffer from indignity and violence. Nirbhaya gang rape case is a one where it is less of a rape and more of a show of strength by the criminals, who consider women inferior, or in other words, inequal to men!

Similarly, the recent Sabariimala case where women is stripped of her sexual dignity by considering menstruation a taboo,

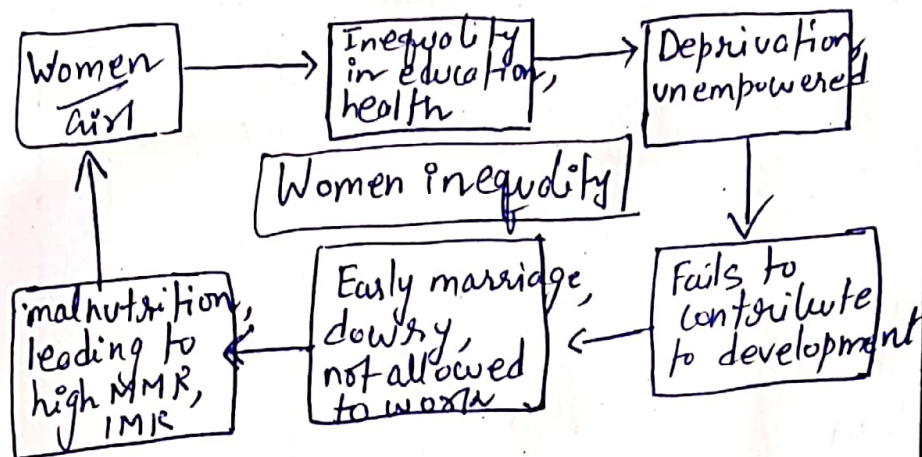
on the Adultery case, where a woman is stripped of her sexual autonomy and was made subservient to males. All these point to the glaring inequalities in the society, which considers women's dignity below men. Thankfully, Supreme Court has revoked such laws, but the mentality remains!

Further, gender inequality is present in other fields like economy. For example, as per Oxfam, though women contribute to 74% of rural workforce, they own only 12% of the land. Not only in rural economy, but in general as well, women face inequality. They suffer from gender pay gap, their domestic work remains unrecognized further they fail to get top posts in MNCs. As per PLFS, women workforce participation rate in India is only 23% and ~~they~~ ^{men} receive 1.2 to 1.3 times more pay for the same job.

Similarly, in the political field, as well, we have incidences of inequality. This can be best understood with the fact that only 11% of the Parliamentarians are women, despite being 50% of the population!

Even at the local level, despite being accorded 33% reservation, the Indian Institute of Public Administration reports that in 94% of the cases, women sarpanch offices are being led by women sarpanch's husband! Isn't this an expression of inequality, where women are considered incapable to wield ~~econom~~ political power?

Further, women face inequalities at other levels. Their nutritious needs are often neglected as they are considered less important than male members. We often see rural women eating after male members. This in turn has led to wide prevalence of "hidden hunger" and anaemia (51%) in women. Girls are forced to help with household work while male child is provided education. They lack financial independence. There goes a saying, "Successful women would lose their husbands!" This is in itself an expression of inequality which considers women being incapable of controlling themselves and needs male members to look after them.



Gender equality: A precondition to poverty reduction, sustainable development and good governance.

Malala Yousufzai says, "All of us cannot succeed when half of us are held back", and she is right, as by women's equality only can be true development achieved.

And first and foremost step towards equality is education. There is a saying, "You educate a man, you educate a man; you educate a woman, you educate a generation". By educating women, we empower her to take decisions, play their part in poverty reduction by contributing to economy and achieve SDGs.

As per McKinsey, India could add 18% of its GDP by involving women. Similarly, as per UNESCO, every year of women's education can reduce incidences of malnutrition by 5-10%. This is a reflection of the importance of women equality in economic and health field, which in turn can be achieved through educational equality.

Likewise, women equality can help us in achieving SDGs related to social aspects like sanitation. For example, success of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan in Jharkhand has been mainly due to women. Thanks to it's ~~1,000~~ ^{10 million} over a ~~1,000~~ ^{10 million} women who participated, around 1.7 lakh toilets were constructed in a record time of today. Similarly, the success of Ujjwala campaign, which is a major step to obtain health SDG, owes much to women's proactive role.

Further, gender equality helps achieve SDGs related to women empowerment, where women enjoy equal

opportunities and are free from violence. Women's equality enables them to come forward, speak for their rights. It makes a woman more assertive, as is visible in recent #MeToo and Time's Up Campaign.

Further, even in the environmental sphere, gender equality empowers a woman to play an active role in environmental conservation. We have examples of women ~~leader~~ like Rukmini Devi who fought for animal rights and initiated the famous Narmada Bachao Andolan. Also, success of movements like Chipko owes much to women participants who left homes and stood against deforestation.

Hence, we can observe that gender equality is indeed a precondition to achieve goals related to health, education, environment, sanitation and so on. Apart from these, gender equality also plays a role in poverty reduction. For example, an environment which values gender

equality will allow women to work. This will result in more and more women like Anupama who contribute to the family income. It will encourage more women to take up entrepreneurship, which would create jobs.

Further, it will even lead to rural prosperity and poverty reduction. For example, Oxfam states that women who has more access to agricultural resources is likely to invest in productive ways, like better seeds which would ultimately improve agriculture, thus ending rural distress.

Similarly, we are a witness to women's role in Operation Flood and Green Revolution. NGOs like SEWA organized over 6000 women cooperatives which contributed to dairy production. As a result, women become the major factor in ending nationwide poverty!

Apart from poverty reduction, Gender equality leads to good governance as well. In a politics ridden

with corruption and devoid of sympathy, ~~women~~ women participation in politics becomes a necessity. We have international examples like Angela Merkel who took Germany to new heights, all due to her good governance initiatives.

Even in India, we have women playing their part in good governance. For example, maihla sarpanch of Bilipur village in Haryana took proactive steps like building toilets and reducing violence against women. Further, we have compassionate women diplomats like Sushma Swaraj or motivated ~~men~~ and devoted ladies like Nirmala Sitharaman. And how can we forget our first lady PM, Shri Indira Gandhi, whose bold steps and implementation of good governance schemes like "Garibi Hatao" made her widely renowned.

Hence, gender ~~inequality~~ inequality is a major precondition towards achieving goals. However, we often overlook the other side of gender equality: the transgenders. Supreme Court has given them

the status of third gender in the NALSA judgement and they too are a major community in our society. However, they continue to face isolation, harassment and discrimination.

Therefore, gender equality applies to transgenders as well. They too are a part of our demographic dividend and empowering them will help us achieve economic and SDG related goals. We have famous transgenders like Shobnom Mausi who are contributed to good governance and poverty reduction as a mayor in MP district.

Step towards Gender equality

Vivekananda had said, "~~No country~~ A bird can't fly with only one wing". Similarly, a nation can't progress without empowering women. Hence, we must take steps towards Gender equality. And the first and foremost step is "Gender sensitization".

Society should be encouraged to support women's education, respect women's dignity. This could be achieved through schemes like BADLAV (Beti Apki Dhan ~~and~~ Lakshmi aur Vijay Lakshmi). Also, cultural aspect could be used to promote women equality like religious values of "Ardhanarishwar" as recommended by Economic Survey.

Further, women's health and education should be promoted. Schemes like Kanyashree for women's education and POSHAN Abhiyaan could be expanded for encouraging their meaningful participation in nation building.

Also, economic equality can be developed by promoting women entrepreneurship through ~~WEP~~ NITI Aayog's WEP platform, or credit through MUDRA Bank. This will inturn help in poverty reduction.

Similarly, in the political

field, we can have reservations for women in the Parliament. Also, there is a need for capacity building of women & sarpanch's. MWCD's initiative of "Nationwide Capacity Building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs)" could be utilized. This will politically empower the women and help in good governance.

Last but not the least, at an individual level, we as an individual, as a society, as an organization and as a nation should act to promote women's equality. Initiatives like that of Adobe, which has embarked on a mission to achieve 100% pay parity in coming years should serve as a role model. Also, governments worldwide should follow the steps of Sweden, which released "world's first feminist policy". India should strive to achieve its constitutional directives of women equality.

Deng Xiaoping had said, "Road to economic development will not be decided by how much resources we have, but by how effectively do we utilize our resources", and women are our most precious resources. They should be empowered so that they play their part in nation building.

Nehru had said, "You could tell the status of a nation by looking at its women". Hence for a nation which wants to attain the status of poverty free, ~~SD~~ achieve SDGs and be known for good governance requires that its women enjoy equality. India which has embarked on a journey to become a \$5 trillion economy fulfill its SDGs, be malnutrition free by 2030 and many such goals, requires active women participation. Then only can we achieve, in Mahatma Gandhi's term "True freedom".

Importance of ~~women~~ gender equality
can be beautifully summarized as
follows,

Yatra Naryastu Pujyante, Tatra Ramte Devala

Yatra itastu Na Pujyante, Sasvastrophalah
karyah

Where women is respected, Gods are happy;
Where they are not, all deed go in vain.

Foundation of New India lies in
rural upliftment

Ram, a class 8th student in a village from Bihar, was going to school. He had recently heard our PM speaking of "New India" and this had him excited. Fortunately for him, the topic for discussion in class that day was Rural India.

Reaching school, Ram was eagerly waiting for his teacher. When the teacher arrived, he could see the excitement in Ram's eyes. He asked, "What is it Ram that excites you? You can discuss freely". Ram said, "Sir, I want to know how I can contribute to New India, how a rural village like his could take part in its foundation?"

The teacher was impressed with Ram's curiosity. He said, "This nation belongs

to rural areas in the same way it belongs to the urban ones. And every rural person, every rural village can indeed play their part in funding a "New India", provided we invest in rural upliftment!

Seeing the class listening to him with all ears, the teacher continued, "But before I emphasise on the role of rural upliftment in the foundation of New India, let us understand what is new India."

• New India is a nation which values liberty, equality and fraternity. Every section of the society, be it Hindus, Muslims or even the remotest of community like the tribals enjoys equal opportunity to progress. Women are respected, elders are accorded due reverence, minorities are protected.

Further, New India has a conducive environment, be it political, social, economic, administrative or legal, where there is equality of opportunity and status.

For example, if it is in political field, there is zero corruption, and

Constitutional values are upheld. In the economic field, there is equal pay for equal work and employment opportunities for everyone.

Further, in the administrative field, there is Ram Rajya (good governance). Civil servants are dedicated like T.N. Sheshan and where public are free to approach any government official. There is no corruption and values like integrity and honesty are practiced.

Similarly, in the environment field, there is absence of pollution. Citizens follow environmental ethics, and where ~~is~~ there is a respect for 'Prakriti' (nature).

In other words, 'New India' is basically analogous to heaven on earth, free from poverty, malnutrition, diseases and where every individual is empowered to make our nation great!..

Ram was hearing his teacher with great interest. He stopped his teacher in between and asked, "Sir, you said earlier that rural India has a role in the foundation of New India, provided we uplift it. How does rural upliftment lay the foundation?"

The teacher emphatically remarked, "The real India lives in its villages!". These words thrilled the class. Everyone asked unanimously, "How Sir, please explain?" The teacher took a sip of water and continued, "Rural India provides immense opportunities in all fields, and if uplifted, it will fulfill our dream of New India."

Let us understand with the social and cultural aspect. Rural India is a reservoir of cultural values like Atithi Devo Bhava, respect for elders, women as Lakshmi or rivers as goddesses Ganga and Saraswati. It has carried the Indian tradition and ethos till today and can be visualized as an organic cultural society.

On the other hand, values in urban areas have declined with increasing materialism, ego and selfishness. Hence, uplifting rural India would re-install Indian culture in the society and provide a balance to the rising materialism. In other words, it would lay the foundation of a value based New India.

Further, uplifting rural India will also lay the foundation of an economically strong New India. For example, agriculture sector is a necessity for our food security. Also, it employs more than 50% of the population. Hence, rural upliftment will improve the agricultural sector, thus reducing the incidences of high debt, farm distress, distress migration and farmers suicides.

Not only in the agricultural field, but in allied fields as well, rural upliftment will provide economic impetus. Livestock farming, widely practiced in rural areas will help in sustaining

White Revolution. Huge mineral resources found in the tribal areas which are predominantly rural will help ⁱⁿ industrial growth. Also, the minor forest produce collected by tribals from rural areas ~~are~~ have huge export potential.

Similarly, in the political field as well, rural upliftment has its benefits. Most of our national leaders like Gandhi, Sardar Patel have their roots in villages. Rural India made them better understand the Indian society, the problems faced and how to solve them. This in turn made them better politicians.

Hence, for a sound political system, rural upliftment is necessary. Rural areas have the benefit of citizen participation through Gram Sabha. Also, 33% reservation for women, PESA and other such provisions ensure that there is wide participation. Hence, rural India is an epitome of "grassroot democracy". And by rural upliftment, we will lay the foundation of a politically strong New India.

Further, in the environmental field, rural India's upliftment will serve great purpose. India is ridden with several environmental challenges like air pollution, water pollution, global warming etc. And herein lies the role of rural India in making India environmentally sound.

For example, rural India promotes cleanliness, as cleanliness is equated to godliness in the Indian culture. Rivers are prayed to as goddesses, there is an attachment to Prakriti or nature. Hence, by uplifting rural India, we would be encouraging environmental ethics.

And not only rural culture, but rural society is also environmentally conscious. The success of Swachh Bharat in rural India was because of rural participation. Chipko movement was a result of rural consciousness. Also, several rural communities are involved in protection of nature.

For example, the Maldharis of Gujarat are famous for their coexistence with the lions of Gir. Similarly, the Bugun Tribe has been recently awarded for conservation of a critically endangered bird.

Likewise, rural upliftment has several other benefits. For example, city life has become congested. This has resulted in growth of slum population. Migration rate has increased, which in turn has contributed to increasing crime rates in cities. There is a high unemployment rate of 6.1% as per PFLS. Cities are facing a shortage of critical infrastructure like hospitals, educational institutions, affordable houses, and sanitation networks.

Therefore, to counter these, rural upliftment has become the need of the hour. Rural upliftment will create jobs, reduce distress migration. Also, employment will help reduce the pressure on land, thus increasing agricultural productivity.

In other words, rural upliftment would develop a prosperous, stable and fundamentally sound New India".

The teacher stopped in between to take rest. In the meantime, Ram kept thinking as to why despite such huge potential, rural India remained backward. Unable to come to terms with his thoughts, Ram asked, "Sir, isn't there any challenge to rural upliftment?"

The teacher suddenly exclaimed, "Despite such huge potential, rural India contributed only around 30% to India's GDP, which is expected to go down further!". All excitement of the class came to a standstill. It seemed as if ground was ~~shaking~~ slipping beneath their feet. The teacher continued, "Rural upliftment indeed has several challenges.

First and foremost is the poor infrastructure status. There is lack

of Primary Health Centres. Schools are in poor condition and face lack of infrastructure and teachers.

Also, the ^{rural} community remains backward in its outlook. There is prevalence of caste bias. Even today in some villages, untouchables have to ring a bell before entering a high caste society! Women are still considered homemakers and lack autonomy to work.

Further, there is prevalence of caste based violence and communal tensions. The Manoj-Babli killing on the orders of Khap panchayat is one of many such examples.

Similarly, there is a distress in economic field as well. NCRB states that around 45 farmers commit suicide every day, most of them belonging to rural India! There is high level of indebtedness, agricultural productivity is decreasing. Also, lack of employment opportunities in

non farm sector has created huge pressure on limited land.

Further, in the political field, there is widespread prevalence of voting on communal lines, corruption etc. Sarpanch would often misappropriate money, favour his relatives etc.

Likewise, in the environmental field as well, ~~open defecation~~ defecation is practiced in several rural areas. Toilets are not being used, rather, many convert it to storehouses!

Further, rural India faces several other constraints like lack of basic amenities like electricity, roads etc. This has hindered private investment.

In a way, challenges have been acting as a brake to rural India's upliftment, which in turn clouds its role in laying the foundation of "New India"

One of the students then asked, "Sir, isn't there a way to ~~release~~ release the brakes? Isn't government doing anything?" The teacher replied, "Yes my child, every challenge comes with a solution, and more is the challenge, better is the taste of success!"

And to address the issue, first and foremost step is to create basic infrastructure in rural India. And the government has taken steps like Samagra Shiksha to develop schools, or Ayushman Bharat to develop Health and Wellness Centres..

Similarly, schemes like PURA and PURBAN aim to create basic amenities like roads and houses in villages. This in turn will create employment opportunities and improve living standards.

Also, the second most important solution is economic development. There should be focus on agri-preneurs. Rural Agricultural infrastructure like coldchain

and warehousing should be promoted.
e-NAM should be given impetus
to raise agricultural incomes.

Further, there should be
a focus on non farm sector, rural
entrepreneurship, which will address
rural-urban migration and release
pressure on land.

And last but not the least,
social values can be encouraged. Example,
the economic survey recommends
SUNDAR initiative to promote a clean
India, or BADLAV for ~~women~~ gender
sensitization.

Hence, it is indeed possible to
uplift rural India so that it lays
the foundation of a new India."

The teacher then concludes, "
Nothing is better than an idea whose
time has come. And it is indeed time

that you, I start working towards rural upliftment. We should not depend on external support, rather develop individual initiatives. This can be as simple as taking small steps like being a value-based person, hardworking, honest to developing bigger ideas and ~~imagi~~ goals like entrepreneurship. You should all remember that the journey to last mile starts with a single step!"

The teacher, feeling satisfied with his class, went away with a smile on his face. The students too were encouraged. Ram resolved that day, "I would study harder, and would become an agri-preneur. This would be my contribution to rural upliftment and a New India."

"Isn't it that by encouraging more like Ram, we can indeed say that Foundation of New India lies in rural upliftment?"