

Mr. UPSC

One middle-class aspirant, three attempts, and the plan that finally worked

SUBASH

The UPSC Syllabus at a Glance

Before the story, the map: the whole syllabus in plain words, paper by paper, with the topics serious candidates actually cover and one working idea for each.

Prelims, GS Paper I — 100 questions, 200 marks

- This paper alone decides the cut-off. **Current events:** the last twelve to eighteen months of schemes, Acts, judgments, reports and indices, summits, missions, and places and species in the news. *Idea:* file each item under its subject, never in a separate notebook.

- **History and the national movement.** Ancient: the Harappan civilisation, the Vedic age, Buddhism and Jainism, the Mauryas, the Guptas. Medieval: the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughals, Vijayanagara, the Bhakti and Sufi movements. Modern, from 1757: British expansion, 1857, the reformers, the Congress, the Gandhian movements, 1947. Art and culture: temple styles, sculpture, painting, music, dance.

- **Geography of India and the world.** Landforms, climate, oceans, soils, vegetation; India's physical regions, rivers, monsoon, crops, minerals, industries. *Idea:* find every place in the news on an atlas the day you read about it.

- **Polity and governance.** Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, Fundamental Duties; Parliament, President, Prime Minister, Governor; the Supreme Court and High Courts; Centre-State relations; emergencies; amendments and the basic structure; constitutional and statutory bodies; panchayats and municipalities; rights issues and public policy.

- **Economic and social development.** National income, inflation, banking, the RBI and monetary policy, the Budget, the balance of payments, agriculture and food security, poverty, inclusion, demographics, social-sector schemes, sustainable development.

- **Environment and science.** Ecosystems, protected areas, endangered species, pollution, climate change, the main conventions and Indian environmental laws; everyday physics, chemistry and biology at NCERT level; health; space, defence, biotechnology, IT and energy in the news.

Prelims, CSAT — 80 questions, 200 marks, need 66

- Comprehension; interpersonal and communication skills; reasoning and analytical ability; decision-making; general mental ability; basic numeracy and data interpretation at Class 10 level. *Idea:* take one full timed paper in your first month. Under 90? Practise three days a week from then on.

Mains, Papers A and B — 300 marks each, need 25%

- Paper A: an Indian language of the Eighth Schedule, at matriculation level — essay, comprehension, précis, translation. Candidates from Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim are exempt. Paper B: English, the

same without translation. Neither is counted, but fail either and nothing else is evaluated.

Mains, the Essay — 250 marks, like each GS paper

- Two essays in three hours, one from each of two sections, about 1,000 to 1,200 words each. Recent topics are short, abstract, often philosophical lines. *Idea*: keep examples under ten heads — individual, family, society, economy, polity, environment, science, ethics, India, the world — and write one essay a week.

Mains, GS I — culture, history, society, geography

- Art forms, literature and architecture, ancient to modern; modern India from the mid-eighteenth century, the freedom struggle and its contributors from every region, consolidation after 1947; world history from the eighteenth century — the industrial revolution, the world wars, colonisation and decolonisation, capitalism and socialism.

- Indian society: diversity, women, population, poverty, urbanisation, globalisation, communalism, regionalism, secularism. Geography: the world's physical geography, where resources lie, why industries locate where they do, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, cyclones.

Mains, GS II — polity, governance, international relations

- The Constitution and its basic structure; federalism and devolution to local bodies; separation of powers; other countries' constitutions; Parliament and state legislatures; the executive and the judiciary; the Representation of the People Act; constitutional, statutory and regulatory bodies.

- Policies and their design; NGOs and self-help groups; welfare schemes for vulnerable sections; health, education, poverty and hunger; transparency, accountability, e-governance and the role of the civil services. India and its neighbours, groupings and agreements, the diaspora, international institutions.

Mains, GS III — economy, technology, environment, security

- Growth, employment, inclusive growth, budgeting; agriculture — cropping, irrigation, marketing, subsidies and MSP, the public distribution system, food security, food processing, land reforms; liberalisation; infrastructure; investment models.

- Science and technology in daily life, indigenisation, IT, space, robotics, nanotechnology, biotechnology, intellectual property. Conservation, pollution, environmental impact assessment, disasters. Internal security: extremism, cyber security, money laundering, borders, organised crime, terrorism, the security forces.

Mains, GS IV — ethics, integrity and aptitude

- Ethics in public and private life; values from leaders and reformers; attitude; integrity, impartiality, objectivity, empathy; emotional intelligence; moral thinkers of India and the world; probity — right to information, codes of conduct, citizens' charters, public funds, corruption. Then case studies. *Idea*: one case a day for the last three months.

Mains, the Optional — two papers, 250 marks each

- One of forty-eight: agriculture; animal husbandry and veterinary science; anthropology; botany; chemistry; civil, electrical

or mechanical engineering; commerce and accountancy; economics; geography; geology; history; law; management; mathematics; medical science; philosophy; physics; political science and international relations; psychology; public administration; sociology; statistics; zoology — or the literature of one of twenty-two Indian languages, or English. *Idea*: choose by interest, then overlap with GS.

The Personality Test — 275 marks

- About thirty minutes with a board: your application form, your state and district, your subjects and work, the issues of the day. *Idea*: read your own form as a stranger would, and prepare every question it invites.

How serious candidates use this syllabus

- Copy it by hand onto one chart, and write one source beside every line.

- Read ten years of prelims and mains questions before studying, and note each one beside the line it came from.

- Study prelims and mains together, subject by subject, and switch to prelims-only work for the last four months.

- Revise every line four times: the next day, the end of the week, the end of the month, and before the exam. And check this page against the current notification on the Commission's official website.

CHAPTER 1

One Tea, Mr. UPSC

The first person to call him Mr. UPSC was Raju brother, and he did not mean it kindly.

It was a February morning in 2023, a few minutes after six. Subash was walking to the library the way he walked to it every day — same bag, same route past the bus stand, same rolled-up newspaper under his arm — and Raju, whom the whole road called Raju brother whatever their age, was pouring tea from a height into small glasses at the corner stall where the road turns towards the market. Three men from the morning bus were standing there, warming their hands.

"Ah," Raju brother said, loud enough for all of them. "Mr. UPSC. One tea? Or does the Collector drink coffee?"

The three men laughed. One of them asked, not unkindly, what UPSC was. Raju brother explained it with great confidence: it was the examination for District Collectors, it was held in Delhi, it was the hardest examination in the whole world, and this boy — he pointed with a glass — had been studying for it for eight months instead of getting a proper job.

Subash took the tea. He paid ten rupees. He said nothing, because there was nothing true he could say that was better than silence, and he walked on.

By the end of that month half the street was calling him Mr. UPSC. The boys who played cricket against the rice mill wall

shouted it when he passed. His aunt said it on the phone to his mother, and his mother pretended not to hear. The name was a joke about a boy who had chosen something too big for himself, and every time someone used it, the joke got a little easier to tell.

It took him three years to make the name mean something else.

This is the story of those three years. But it begins nine months before Raju brother's tea, on the evening his degree results came out.

* * *

It was May 2022. Subash Kumar was twenty-one years old, and he had just learned that he had passed his B.Sc. Physics with seventy-one per cent, first class, from a government college an hour and a half away by bus.

The story continues.

Twenty-three chapters and an epilogue. 116 pages.

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