

**INTERNATION RELATIONS**

**BIMSTEC Grouping: Relevance & Concerns**

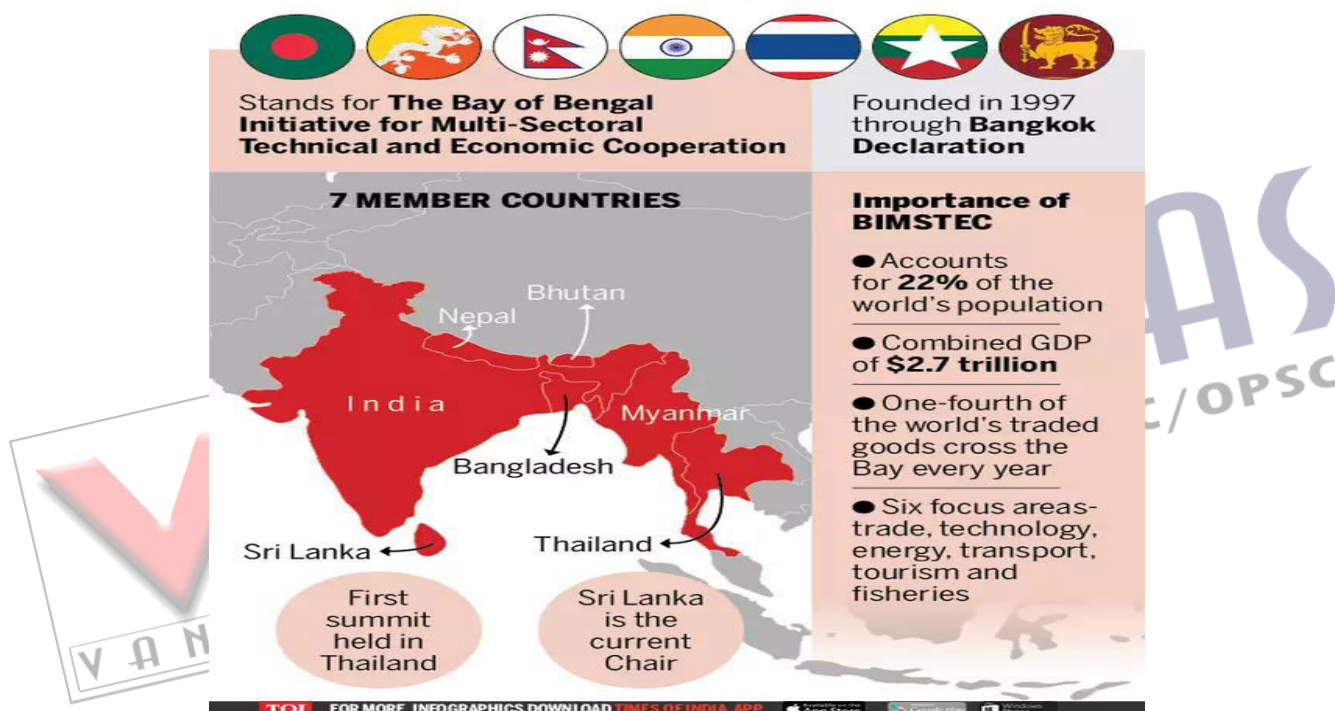
**In Context:** The first-ever Foreign Ministers’ meeting of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) began in Bangkok, Thailand.

**ABOUT BIMSTEC**

- ✓ BIMSTEC is a regional organisation that was established in 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.
- ✓ Initially known as BIST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation).
- ✓ The organisation is now known as BIMSTEC and comprises seven members, with Myanmar joining towards the end of 1997, and Bhutan and Nepal in 2004.
- ✓ Permanent Secretariat: Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- ✓ Leadership is rotated in alphabetical order of country names.

**BIMSTEC**

**WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW**



**Significance of BIMSTEC**

- ✓ **Economical Importance:** Around 22% of the world’s population live in the seven countries around the Bay of Bengal, with a combined GDP close to \$2.7 trillion.
  - All seven countries have sustained average annual rates of growth between 3.4% and 7.5% from 2012 to 2016.
- ✓ **Boosting Connectivity:** Projects within the BIMSTEC can help in improving relations with its neighbors.
- ✓ **Platform for resolving issues:** The platform can help in addressing the challenges like terrorism, coastal security, drug trafficking etc.
- ✓ **Freedom of Navigation:** This can serve as a transit route between Indian and Pacific nations.
- ✓ **Countering China:** This prevents China from becoming the predominant political, military and economic power in the Indian Ocean region.

**Importance of BIMSTEC for India**

- ✓ For India, BIMSTEC aligns with its ‘Act East’ policy for greater regional cooperation in southeast Asia.
- ✓ It could also be seen as aligning with India’s larger goal to gain trade and security prominence in the Indian Ocean region and to cater to the concept of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ region, a major focus of Quad countries.
- ✓ India also made efforts to enhance the pace of BIMSTEC’s progress in recent years.
  - The BIMSTEC Energy Centre was set up in Bengaluru, along with the BIMSTEC Business Council, a forum for business organisations to promote regional trade.
  - It aims to create free-trade and power grid interconnectivity agreements, and a masterplan for transport connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region (adopted at the current summit).

- ✓ India also made efforts to enhance the pace of BIMSTEC's progress in recent years. The BIMSTEC Energy Centre was set up in Bengaluru, along with the BIMSTEC Business Council, a forum for business organisations to promote regional trade.

### **BIMSTEC and SAARC**

- ✓ The idea of BIMSTEC also gained prominence after the 2016 Uri attack when India was able to get SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) nations on its side to boycott the organisations' summit, which was to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan.
- ✓ SAARC and BIMSTEC focus on geographically overlapping regions. But, they are not equal alternatives. SAARC is a purely regional organization, whereas BIMSTEC is inter-regional and connects both South Asia and ASEAN.
- ✓ Unlike SAARC, which is burdened by India-Pakistan hostilities, BIMSTEC is relatively free of sharp bilateral disagreements and promises to provide India with a co-operative sphere of its own.

### **Major Concerns**

- ✓ Despite signing a framework agreement for a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2004, BIMSTEC stands far away from this goal.
- ✓ BIMSTEC members have not adopted a Free Trade Agreement yet, they are involved in multiple bilateral and multilateral free trade, preferential trade and economic cooperation agreements with other countries.
- ✓ Lack of efficiency and "sluggish" pace of BIMSTEC's progress.
- ✓ The inconsistency in holding policy making and operational meetings was mentioned earlier.
- ✓ BIMSTEC secretariat also suffers from inadequate financial and manpower assistance for its operational activities
- ✓ The other disappointment is connectivity — in infrastructure (roads, railways, air, river, and coastal shipping links), energy, the digital and financial domain, and institutions that bring people closer together for trade, tourism and cultural exchanges

### **Way Ahead**

- ✓ A strong political will and collective resolve are required for BIMSTEC to succeed. This corresponds with India's Act East policy of extending regional connectivity to nations south-east of it.
- ✓ BIMSTEC should focus more in the future on new areas such as the blue economy, the digital economy, and promotion of exchanges and links among start-ups and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
- ✓ India has to ensure equally sustained political engagement with partners such as Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to prevent any domestic political spillover from affecting bilateral and group-level working relationships.
- ✓ India's "Act East" and "Extended Neighbourhood" approaches also find consonance with its effort with BIMSTEC to bridge the gaps with nations of SouthEast Asia and Africa and further boost trade relations with them.

## **INDEX AND REPORT**

### **1. Export Preparedness Index 2022 Report**

**In Context:** Recently, NITI Aayog released the Export Preparedness Index 2022 report in New Delhi.

### **About Export Preparedness Index 2022 report**

- ✓ EPI is a comprehensive tool which measures the export preparedness of the States and UTs in India.
  - Exports are vital for simulating economic growth and development in a country, which necessitates understanding the factors which influence export performance.
- ✓ Pillars : The report presents a comprehensive analysis of India's export performance in FY22, along with its sector-specific and district-level merchandise export trends. The EPI 2022 Report evaluates the performance of the states across four pillars
  - Policy Pillar evaluates states and UTs' performance based on its adoption of the export-related policy ecosystem at a state and district level as well as the institutional framework surrounding the ecosystem.
  - Business Ecosystem assesses the prevailing business environment in a state/UT, along with the extent of business-supportive infrastructure, and a state/UTs' transport connectivity.
  - Export Ecosystem focuses on the export-related infrastructure in a state/UT along with the trade support provided to the exporters, and the prevalence of Research and Development in the state/UT to foster innovation.
  - Export Performance is an output-based indicator which gauges the growth of a state's export over the previous year and analyses its export concentration and footprint on the global markets.

### **Key Highlights**

- ✓ The EPI 2022 Report observed that most 'Coastal States' have performed well, with the states of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat being the top-performers in the Export Preparedness Index across the country, in all categories of states.

- ✓ The efforts of state governments in improving the policy ecosystem have led many states to create export promotion policies and district-level export action plans.
- ✓ It said, 73 percent of districts in the country have an export action plan, and over 99 percent are covered under the One District One Product scheme.
- ✓ It states that 100 districts in the country are responsible for nearly 87 percent of the country's exports.

**Concerns**

- ✓ Highlighting the lack of adequate transport connectivity, the report mentions that the absence of air connectivity hampers the movement of goods across regions especially in the landlocked states.

**Suggestions**

- ✓ The report recommended that for the states which are lagging in terms of export commission, the central government should extend support to enable them to build the necessary ecosystem to facilitate their export.
- ✓ It is also recommended that Indian states need to invest in research and development for developing market-specific products and improving product quality.
- ✓ The report further highlights the need to develop our districts as export hubs in the country and undertakes a district-level analysis of merchandise exports in the country.
- ✓ By improving collaboration among states, and between state and Centre, India can aspire to achieve sustained economic growth and leverage its heterogeneity to foster development at national and sub-national levels

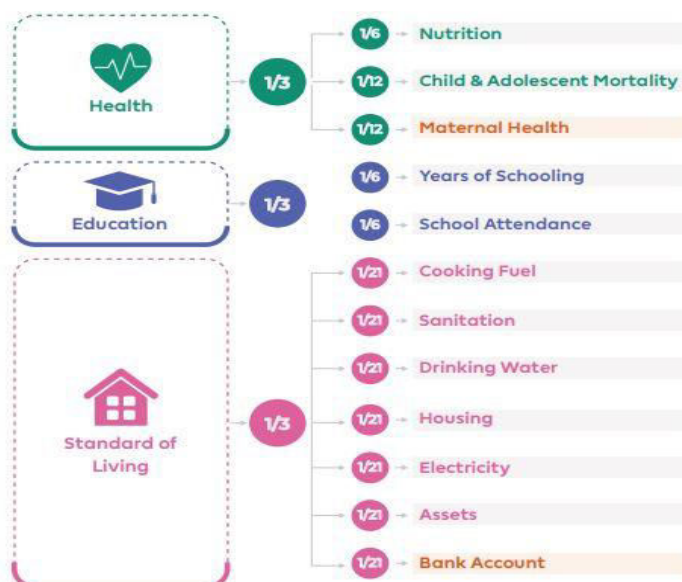
**2. National Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023**

**In Context:** NITI Aayog has released the **National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A Progress Review 2023**.

**About the Index**

- ✓ NITI Aayog, as the nodal agency for MPI, has been responsible for constructing an indigenized index for monitoring the performance of States and Union Territories in addressing multidimensional poverty.
- ✓ The national MPI model retains the ten indicators of the global MPI model, staying closely aligned to the global methodology.
  - It has three equally weighted dimensions – Health, Education, and Standard of living – which are represented by 12 indicators.
  - It also adds two indicators, viz., Maternal Health and Bank Accounts in line with national priorities.

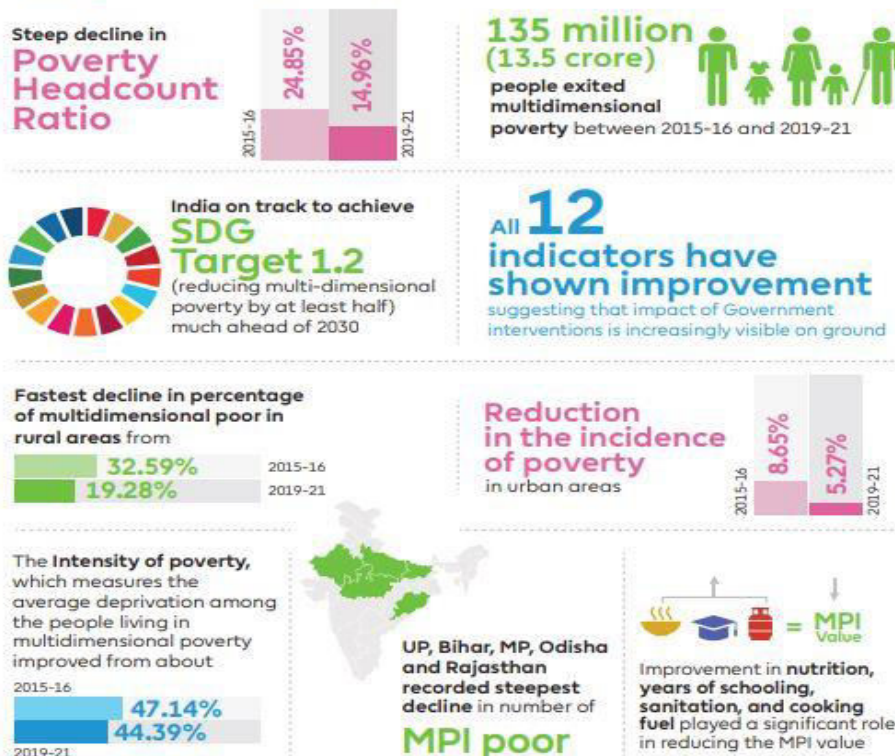
**Indicators and their weights**



- ✓ This is the second edition of the national MPI and is a follow-up to the Baseline Report published in November 2021.
- ✓ It provides multidimensional poverty estimates for India's 36 States & Union Territories.
- ✓ These estimates have been computed using data from the 5th round of the NFHS (NFHS-5) conducted in 2019-21.

**Key Highlights**

**Highlights: MPI Progress Report 2023**



- ✓ **Reduction in Poverty:** India has registered a significant decline of 9.89 percentage points in the number of India’s multidimensional poor from 24.85% in 2015-16 to 14.96% in 2019-21.
- ✓ **Decline in poverty in rural areas:** The rural areas witnessed the fastest decline in poverty from 32.59% to 19.28%.
  - During the same period, the urban areas saw a reduction in poverty from 8.65% to 5.27%.
- ✓ **Decline in poverty in states:** The fastest reduction in the proportion of multidimensional poor was observed in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Rajasthan.
  - Uttar Pradesh registered the largest decline in the number of poor with 3.43 crore people escaping multidimensional poverty.
- ✓ **Aligned with SDG Target:** Between 2015-16 and 2019-21, the MPI value has nearly halved from 0.117 to 0.066 and the intensity of poverty has reduced from 47% to 44%, thereby setting India on the path of achieving the SDG Target 1.2 (of reducing multidimensional poverty by at least half) much ahead of the stipulated timeline of 2030.
- ✓ **Successful Government Initiatives:** Flagship programmes like the Poshan Abhiyan and Anaemia Mukh Bharat have contributed to reduced deprivations in health. Initiatives such as Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) have improved sanitation across the country. The impact of these efforts is evident in the swift 21.8 percentage points improvement in sanitation deprivations.
  - The provision of subsidized cooking fuel through the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has positively transformed lives, with a 14.6 percentage points improvement in cooking fuel deprivations.
  - Initiatives like Saubhagya, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), and Samagra Shiksha have also played a major role in significantly reducing multidimensional poverty in the country.

**Conclusion:** The findings from the second edition of the National MPI will serve as a valuable resource for States and Union Territories to identify and amplify actions that have triggered progress since the findings of the Baseline Report, right upto the district level. It will also enable them to track the progress of the vulnerable hotspots and pinpoint areas that require further targeted policy interventions and programmatic action.

**PRELIM FACTS**

**1. INDIA-MYANMAR-THAILAND TRILATERAL HIGHWAY**

**In context:** The external affairs minister met his Myanmar counterpart Than Swe and discussed expediting projects, especially the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, and underlined the importance of ensuring peace and stability in the border areas.

**About**

- ✓ India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMT Highway), 1,360 km long route, is a highway under construction under India's Look East policy that will connect Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar.
- ✓ Significance: The road is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN–India Free Trade Area, as well as with the rest of Southeast Asia.
- ✓ Scope
  - India has also proposed extending the highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
  - The proposed approx 3,200 km route from India to Vietnam is known as the East-West Economic Corridor (Thailand to Cambodia and Vietnam became operational in 2015).



- This highway will also connect to the river ports being developed along the way at Kalay (also called Kalaymyo) and Monywa on Chindwin River.

✓ **India's contribution**

- The 160-km long India-Myanmar Friendship road linking Moreh-Tamu-Kalmeya-Kalewa is also a part of this trilateral highway.
- India has undertaken the construction of two sections of the highway in Myanmar: The construction of the 120.74 km Kalewa-Yagyi road section, and the construction of 69 bridges along with the approach road on the 149.70 km Tamu-Kyigone-Kalewa (TKK) road section.
- The highway's Imphal-Moreh portion on the Indian side is expected to be completed by 2023.
- Also, India plans to upgrade the route from Zokhawthar in Mizoram to Tedim in the Chin State of Myanmar as an additional connection to the IMT trilateral highway

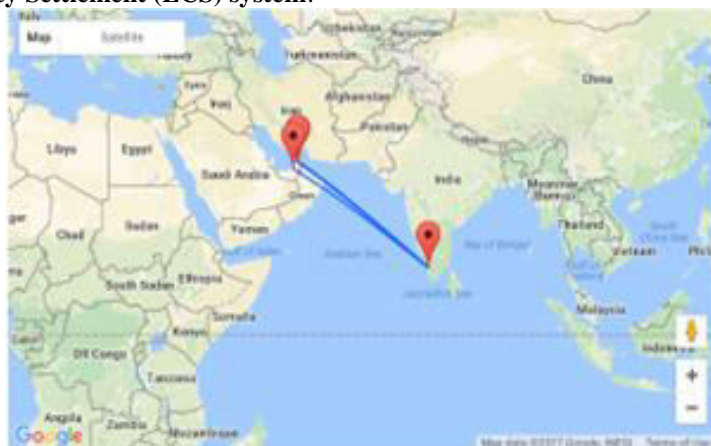
**2. Local Currency Settlement (LCS)**

**In Context:** Recently, India and UAE signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding on Local Currency Settlement (LCS) system.

**Background:-**

- The agreement was signed between the Reserve Bank of India and the Central Bank of the UAE.
- Objective: to revolutionize cross-border transactions between the two nations.

**About Local Currency Settlement (LCS) system:-**



- ✓ The Local Currency Settlement (LCS) system enables exporters and importers to invoice and pay in their respective domestic currencies.
- ✓ The LCS system between India and UAE allows for the use of the Indian Rupee and UAE Dirham in bilateral trade.

- ✓ It is India's first-ever LCS arrangement.
- ✓ This innovative system is expected to have a transformative impact on transaction costs and processing time.
- ✓ It is anticipated to have a ripple effect on global economic engagements, encouraging the use of local currencies and fostering greater financial independence.
- ✓ It will increase the reliance on local currencies.
- ✓ The LCS system, will provide a seamless and efficient mechanism for cross-border transactions
- ✓ It will reduce dependence on international currencies and further strengthen economic cooperation.
- ✓ It will enable the use of surplus balances in local currencies for investment in various local currency assets, such as corporate bonds, government securities, and equity markets, creating new avenues for growth and collaboration.
- ✓ It will amplify the preferential terms already established by the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), bringing new opportunities for trade and investment.
- ✓ CEPA: a free trade agreement between two countries which covers negotiation on the trade in services and investment, and provides for an institutional mechanism to encourage and improve trade between the two countries.
- ✓ This arrangement would also promote investments and remittances.

### 3. **Alzheimer's Disease:**

**In context:** New criteria for detecting Alzheimer's disease created by physicians and researchers from around the world were recently presented at the International Alzheimer's Congress (AAIC) in Amsterdam.

#### **About Alzheimer's Disease:**

- ✓ It is a progressive and degenerative neurological disorder that affects the brain, leading to memory loss, cognitive decline, and behavioural changes.
- ✓ It slowly destroys memory and thinking skills and, eventually, the ability to carry out the simplest tasks.
- ✓ It is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for 60-80% of all dementia cases.
- ✓ The condition primarily affects older adults, typically starting after the age of 65, though early-onset forms can occur in individuals younger than 65.

**Cause:** The exact cause of Alzheimer's disease is not fully understood, but it is believed to be influenced by a combination of genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors.

#### **Symptoms:**

- ✓ Early signs may include mild memory loss, difficulty finding words, misplacing items, and trouble with problem-solving.
- ✓ As the disease advances, individuals may experience more severe memory impairment, confusion, mood swings, changes in behaviour, disorientation, and difficulty with basic tasks like dressing and eating.

#### **Treatment:**

- ✓ There is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, and the available treatments mainly focus on managing symptoms and slowing down its progression.
- ✓ Medications may be prescribed to enhance cognitive function or manage behavioural and psychological symptoms.

#### **What is Dementia?**

- ✓ Dementia is not a specific disease but rather an umbrella term used to describe a group of symptoms affecting cognitive abilities, memory, thinking, and social abilities.
- ✓ It is a progressive condition that impairs a person's ability to carry out daily activities and can significantly affect their quality of life.
- ✓ The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer's disease, which accounts for the majority of cases.
- ✓ However, there are several other types of dementia, each with its underlying causes. Some of the common types of dementia include: Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia, Frontotemporal Dementia and Mixed Dementia.

## ANSWER WRITING

**Q. Analyze the trends of change and continuity in the marriage and family system in India. How far is globalization responsible for these changes?**

**Introduction:** Family system can be seen as an economic provision to satisfy needs, emotional basis, as an influential group and as an instrument of social regulation. A striking feature of Indian family system is the existence of joint family system. It shows features like largeness in size, owning of joint property, sharing of common residence, practicing of common religion etc.

Marriage is an institution in India. Various types of marriages are followed in our country monogamy being followed at large. As the society has advanced marriage has gone through various changes, while some things remain constant. Even values attached to it have changed tremendously. Change and continuity in marriage and family system in India and effect of globalization:

### Changes in Family System

- Globalisation has led to greater mobility of people and more interactions among people of different cultures thus impacting the values and culture of people. Eg live-in relationships in metro cities are a new trend before marriages so as to make better decisions while choosing partners.
- Increasing mobility of younger generation in search of new employment and educational opportunities has weakened the family relations. This has affected the earlier idealized notion of 'family' as the caring and nurturing unit for children, the sick and elderly. It has also led to increase in female headed family units in rural areas because males often migrate in search of work.
- Younger generation, particularly those with higher education and jobs no longer believe in sacrificing individual interest to family interests. This is reflected in changes in marriage system.
- Since women now are more educated and many are financially independent, they have greater say in household decisions. Here impact of globalization can be seen in form of boom in IT related jobs. Women form a large part of this sector. Well employed women in urban areas face increased pressure to handle dual duty of earning livelihood as well as household chores.
- Partner relationships and parent child relationship-Married men and women are staying separately at far off places on account of their jobs. Single parents-Married also found in the society. Not only the conjugal relationships but also the parent – children relationships has also undergone a tremendous change. In most of the working – couple families, parents are not able to devote time to meet and interact with their children as working in night-shifts is common in BPO, KPO and call centre jobs.

### Changes in Marriage system

- Selection of partner: Earlier it was the prerogative of the parents or the guardians. Under impact of liberal values, individuals have started choosing their own partners according to their likes and dislikes.
- A new trend is emerging in the process of mate selection wherein social media dating sites are widely being used to find compatible partners.
- Marriage is not compulsory: Some men and women do not believe in the ancient religious values and therefore do not consider marriage to be necessary. Earlier marriage was considered to be a duty for a man to lead a fulfilled life.
- Inter-caste Marriage: Inter-caste marriages were prohibited. It is now legally permitted. With the increase of co-education, women education and the democratic ideal of equality and liberty, intercaste marriages are now considered to be signs of forwardness.
- Changes in the Aims of Marriage: The main objective of Hindu marriage was Dharma. In recent years, the order of aims of marriage has undergone change wherein individuals are looking for marriage as way to have an understanding partner to fulfill physical and emotional needs.
- Provision for Divorce: The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 has introduced a significant change in the institution of Hindu marriage by permitting divorce under certain specific circumstances.
- Stability of Marriage: The hindrance on divorce made the institution of family and marriage stable and enduring. Due to the enactment of marriage and family legislations and many other factors the divorce rate in India has been steadily increasing.

### Despite the above changes some things still remain constant such as-

- Marriage is not a social contract among Hindus. It is still sacrament for Hindus. Mutual fidelity and devotion to partner are still considered to be an essence of marriage.
- Social evils like child marriage, dowry system, and domestic violence are still prevalent.
- Weddings in India are still considered as an event to display social status of families specially in urban India. Lavish weddings in India often witness celebratory firings and unnecessary extravagance.
- The guidance of elders is considered important while choosing marriage partners and in many cases even cherished.
- LGBTQ community, divorcees, single mothers etc are still looked down upon in society.
- Values like Mutual fidelity and devotion to partner are still considered to be an essence of marriage.

**Conclusion:** To cope up with the changes brought by globalisation and other changes, it is the responsibility of every citizen to impart with our Indian Value system to our young ones & kids the importance of Indian culture, joint family and its values so that our next generations may be saved from some negative effects of globalization while at the same time benefit from positive values of modernization. Henceforth it can be concluded that every step of movement towards economic, political and cultural modernization, taken by the state in India must be responded by the people with an enhanced sense of selfconsciousness and awareness of identity.

### MCQ

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Recently, Prime Minister will inaugurate the New Integrated Terminal Building of Veer Savarkar International Airport. | 1. Veer Savarkar International Airport, also known as Port Blair Airport. |
|  | 2. It is the main airport of the Andhra Pradesh of India.                 |

3. 'The History of the War of Indian Independence'. Book was written by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar  
How many of the above statement is/are correct?  
a) Only 1  
b) **Only 2**  
c) Only 3  
d) None
2. Considered the following statement:  
1. Alzheimer's disease is a neurological disorder that affects the brain, leading to memory loss, cognitive decline, and behavioural changes.  
2. There is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease available.  
3. It is a communicable disease.  
How many of the above statement is/are correct?  
a) Only 1  
b) **Only 2**  
c) Only 3  
d) None
3. Recently, India and UAE signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding on Local Currency Settlement (LCS) system, considered the following statement.  
1. The Local Currency Settlement (LCS) system enables exporters and importers to invoice and pay in their respective domestic currencies.  
2. It is India's first-ever LCS arrangement  
3. UAE Currency is called as Dirham  
How many of the above statement is/are correct?  
a) Only 1  
b) Only 2  
c) Only 3  
d) **None**
4. Considered the following statement regarding India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway.  
1. The 160-km long India-Myanmar Friendship road linking project also a part of this trilateral highway.  
2. This highway will also connect to the river ports  
Which of the above statement is/are correct?  
a) Only 1  
b) Only 2  
c) **Both 1 and 2**  
d) Neither 1 nor 2
5. **NITI Aayog has released the National Multidimensional Poverty Index: A Progress Review 2023:**  
1. The rural areas witnessed the fastest decline in poverty.  
2. Uttar Pradesh registered the largest decline in the number of poor.  
Which of the above statement is/are correct?  
a) Only 1  
b) Only 2  
c) **Both 1 and 2**  
d) Neither 1 nor 2
6. With reference to the Export Preparedness Index 2022 report, which of the following statements is/are correct?  
1. It is a comprehensive tool which measures the export preparedness of the States and UTs in India.  
2. It is released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.  
3. Tamil Nadu has topped the State in Export Preparedness Index (EPI) for 2022.  
Select the correct answer using the code given below:  
a) **1 and 3 only**  
b) 3 only  
c) 2 only  
d) 1,2 and 3
7. Solomon Island, which was recently seen in the news, is located in:  
a) Atlantic Ocean  
b) Indian Ocean  
c) **Pacific Ocean**  
d) None of the above
8. With reference to the Gambusia fish, consider the following statements:  
1. It is known as mosquito fish.  
2. The International Union for Conservation of Nature declared this as invasive alien species.  
3. It is native to the India Ocean.  
How many of the statements given above are correct?  
a) Only 1  
b) **Only 2**  
c) Only 3  
d) None
9. From which of the following countries India has translocated Cheetahs in Kuno National Park?  
a) Iran  
b) **South Africa and Namibia**  
c) Kenya and Uganda  
d) Sudan and South Sudan
10. With reference to BIMSTEC, consider the following:  
1. Bangladesh  
2. Myanmar  
3. Maldives  
4. Nepal  
5. Thailand  
How many of the above countries are members of BIMSTEC?  
a) Only 2  
b) Only 3  
c) **Only 4**  
d) All of the above