



# INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

## MEDIA ETHICS



GS-4

# INSIGHTS CURRENT AFFAIRS

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# GENERAL STUDIES – 4

## ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

**Context:** Article in news revisited how [Ayurveda](#) and ancient Indian philosophy embed environmental ethics in the triad of water, soil, and spirit—a timely reminder as India advances climate resilience and sustainable farming goals.

### About Environmental Ethics in Indian Philosophy:

#### What it is?

- It is a moral framework that perceives nature not as a resource but as an extension of consciousness—where caring for the Earth is a sacred duty (*Dharma*).

#### Features:

- Holistic worldview:** The *Pancha Mahabhutas* (earth, water, fire, air, space) link human health with planetary balance.
- Moral stewardship:** Protecting nature is self-care; harm to soil, water, or air is harm to one’s own being.
- Ahimsa and interdependence:** Every creature, element, and microbe deserves non-violence and respect.
- Spiritual ecology:** [Environmental degradation](#) is seen as both ecological and psychological imbalance.
- Sustainability as spirituality:** Practices such as rain-water harvesting, seasonal cropping, and sacred groves arose from this ethos.



### Various Indian Philosophies on Environment

#### Vedic & Upanishadic Thought:

- The Vedic worldview sees the universe as a sacred organism where humans, gods, and nature form one moral continuum. The hymn “*Mata Bhumi Putro Aham Prithivyah*” enshrines ecological kinship—Earth as mother, humanity as child—urging stewardship over exploitation.

#### Ayurveda:

- Ayurveda treats environmental health as the foundation of human health, where disturbed *doshas* mirror polluted ecosystems. Soil (*Bhoomi Devi*), water, and air are living entities whose purity sustains both body and spirit.

#### Jainism:

- Jain philosophy extends *Ahimsa* beyond human life to include earth, air, and water—each possessing consciousness. By practising *Aparigraha* (non-possession), Jains model ethical restraint and compassionate coexistence with all forms of being.

#### Buddhism:

- Buddhism perceives nature through *Pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent origination)—all beings arise in mutual interdependence. Compassion (*Karuna*) is extended to the planet, framing sustainability as mindfulness in action.

#### Sikhism:

- Sikhism sanctifies ecological balance through Guru Nanak’s verse, “*Pavan Guru, Pani Pita, Mata Dharat Mahat,*” teaching that air, water, and earth are divine teachers of humility and care. Environmental stewardship thus becomes an act of devotion (*Seva*).

### Other Environmental Philosophies (Western Approaches)

- Deep Ecology (Arne Næss):** Deep Ecology argues that all living beings—humans, animals, and plants—have *intrinsic value* independent of human use. It calls for a radical shift from anthropocentrism to *ecocentrism*, emphasising self-realisation through unity with nature. **Eg:** Norway’s wilderness protection policies and global rewilding movements reflect this philosophy’s influence.
- Utilitarian Environmentalism (John Stuart Mill):**

Grounded in the principle of “the greatest good for the greatest number,” this view weighs environmental decisions by their net benefit to human welfare. While pragmatic, it risks valuing ecosystems only for utility. **Eg:** Modern cost-benefit analyses in climate policy and renewable energy subsidies follow this utilitarian logic.

- **Ecofeminism (Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood):** Ecofeminism parallels the exploitation of nature with the oppression of women, calling for nurturing, care-based ethics to heal both. It stresses interconnectedness, empathy, and cooperative coexistence.

### Challenges Associated:

- **Commodification of spirituality:** The sacred principles of *Ahimsa* and *Dharma* are being reduced to commercial eco-labels, turning reverence into marketing. This erodes the intrinsic moral relationship between humanity and nature that Indian philosophy upholds.
- **Urban alienation:** Modern lifestyles cut individuals off from the rhythms of nature—seasons, soil, and sky—creating a spiritual void and apathy toward [ecological suffering](#). Without this inner connection, environmentalism becomes intellectual, not ethical.
- **Policy-practice gap:** Environmental laws often measure compliance in statistics, not conscience. Without moral education and community participation, governance fails to awaken a sense of sacred duty (*Kartavya*) toward the Earth.
- **Cultural dilution:** Ritual pollution through plastics, chemicals, and unrestrained consumption contradicts the original Vedic purity codes that sanctified rivers and forests. Sacred traditions lose moral authenticity when detached from ecological discipline.
- **Climate modernity dilemma:** India faces the ethical tension between material progress and ecological restraint—how to grow without greed. True modernity lies in harmonising prosperity with *Prakriti*, not in mastering or exploiting it.

### Way Ahead:

- **Integrate ethics into education:** Embed *Vedic ecology*, *Panchabhuta harmony*, and *Ahimsa ethics* in the [NEP 2020](#) curriculum to nurture ecological conscience from childhood—transforming sustainability into a moral habit,

not a syllabus.

- **Policy fusion:** Blend science with spirituality by linking Ayurveda’s balance principles to missions like *Jal Jeevan*, *Namami Gange*, and [PM-PRANAM](#)—ensuring that ecological policy is guided by compassion as much as by compliance.
- **Community stewardship:** Empower local temples, panchayats, and faith-based trusts to become custodians of rivers, forests, and sacred groves. Ethical decentralisation reconnects spirituality with service (*Seva*) to the Earth.
- **Modern technology for ancient wisdom:** Use AI, GIS, and satellite mapping to protect sacred natural sites, medicinal plant habitats, and traditional water systems—where modern innovation becomes an instrument of *Sanatan* preservation, not destruction.
- **Global advocacy:** Project India’s *Ecological Dharma* at COP-30 and [UNESCO](#) as a civilisational philosophy of restraint and reverence—demonstrating that environmental ethics is not merely a policy choice, but a moral destiny for humankind.

### Conclusion:

Indian philosophy teaches that *Prakriti* (Nature) and *Atman* (Self) are reflections of one consciousness. Restoring that unity transforms environmental protection into spiritual evolution. By aligning **water, soil, and spirit**, India can pioneer a global ethic of compassionate sustainability.

## MEDIA ETHICS

**Context:** Leaked hospital footage of veteran [actor Dharmendra](#), widely circulated by paparazzi and some media outlets, triggered a public outcry over intrusion into privacy and “death rumours”.



### About Media Ethics:

- Media ethics is the set of moral principles and professional standards that guide journalists and media organizations in how they gather, produce, and publish information, balancing freedom of expression with responsibility to the public.
- **Core Features:**
  - **Truth & Accuracy:** Information must be verified before publication, presented in proper context, and corrected when wrong; respect for truth and the public's right to know is the first duty of the journalist.
  - **Objectivity & Fairness:** Reports should distinguish fact from opinion, present multiple perspectives where relevant, and avoid deliberate bias or sensational distortion.
  - **Independence & Integrity:** Journalists should resist political, corporate, or personal pressures, avoid [conflicts of interest](#), and not accept bribes or favours that influence coverage.
  - **Respect for Privacy & Dignity:** Media should avoid unnecessary intrusion into private life, particularly in moments of grief, illness, or vulnerability, unless a clear and overriding public interest justifies disclosure.
  - **Accountability to the Public:** Primary responsibility is owed to citizens, not governments or owners; mechanisms like corrections, ombudsmen, and press councils help maintain credibility and answerability.

### Need for Strong Media Ethics in Modern Times:

- **24x7 Breaking-News Culture:** The race to be "first" often overrides the duty to be "right", leading to half-verified stories and serious harm. **E.g.** In Nov 2025, false rumours of Dharmendra's death ran across channels before verification, forcing his family into public damage control.
- **Digital Virality & social media:** One unethical clip or misleading headline can reach millions in minutes, making corrections too late to undo the damage. **E.g.** A brutal video from Myanmar was mislabelled as Manipur violence, inflaming tensions before fact-checkers could debunk it.

- **Trust Deficit in Institutions:** Sensational, [partisan coverage](#) erodes trust in media, weakening democracy that depends on shared facts and rational debate. **E.g.** The 2024 Reuters Digital News Report flagged declining trust in Indian news, amid polarised coverage of elections and political arrests.
- **Infotainment & TRP Pressure:** Commercial competition pushes channels towards emotional, intrusive "infotainment" instead of sober, [public-interest journalism](#). **E.g.** The leaked ICU video of an ailing Dharmendra in Nov 2025 was aired for shock value, not public interest, triggering outrage over dignity.
- **Vulnerability of Celebrities & Ordinary Citizens:** High-profile figures, victims, children and patients face voyeuristic coverage that amounts to secondary victimisation. **E.g.** After Sushant Singh Rajput's death, channels aired body images and private chats, violating his and his family's privacy and dignity.

### Reasons for Decline in Media Ethics:

- **Commercialisation & TRP/Clicks Race:** Ad-driven models reward outrage, glamour and conflict, nudging newsrooms towards [sensationalism and intrusive](#) tactics. **E.g.** Nightly shouting matches in "debates" are crafted to spike TRPs and ad revenue, not to inform viewers meaningfully.
- **Weak Self-Regulation:** Ethical codes exist but enforcement is weak; penalties are too small to deter profitable unethical content. **E.g.** In 2023, the Supreme Court called NBSA fines "toothless" against channels that "go berserk" and earn far more from such broadcasts.
- **Ambiguous "Public Interest" Claims:** Anything that grabs attention is badged as "public interest", even when it is just satisfying voyeuristic curiosity. **E.g.** Channels justified airing Sushant Singh Rajput's psychiatric records as "public interest", widely criticised as pure sensationalism.
- **Competitive Paparazzi Culture:** Freelance paparazzi chase "exclusives" with little ethical oversight, normalising stalking and non-consensual filming. **E.g.** Repeated pleas by Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli not to photograph their child show how celebrity privacy is routinely violated.
- **Political & Corporate Influence:** Big business

and political interests use ownership and ads to shape narratives, sidelining independent, [ethical scrutiny](#).

**E.g.** Corporate takeovers like that of NDTV sparked concerns that editorial lines could bend towards owners’ political–business interests.

- **Audience Fatigue & Normalisation:** Constant exposure to unethical formats desensitises viewers, turning once-shocking practices into accepted “industry norms.”

**E.g.** Prime-time shouting matches, once outrageous, are now routine, signalling how audiences and channels have normalised toxic news culture.

### Way Ahead:

- **Strengthen Self-Regulation:** News organisations should adopt and actually enforce detailed ethics codes, correction policies, and [internal review mechanisms](#); industry-wide press councils must be more active and visible.
- **Clear Privacy Protocols:** Media houses must define red lines—no filming in ICUs, no publication of sensitive medical images or grief moments without explicit consent and demonstrable public-interest justification.
- **Ethics Training & Newsroom Culture:** Regular ethics workshops, case-study discussions (like this Dharmendra episode), and editorial checks should be embedded into daily journalistic practice.
- **Transparency & Accountability:** Visible correction boxes, ombudsmen, public editors, reader feedback columns, and open apologies should become routine tools of accountability.
- **Digital & Paparazzi Guidelines:** Platform-specific and paparazzi-specific norms—on chasing, filming, children, medical spaces, funerals, and homes—must be jointly framed and enforced by media associations.
- **Media Literacy for Citizens:** Educating audiences to question sources, reject voyeuristic content, and support ethical outlets increases pressure on media to behave responsibly.

### Conclusion:

Episodes like the leaked Dharmendra hospital video show how, without ethics, the right to report can turn into a licence to violate dignity. Media freedom is non-negotiable, but it must travel with truthfulness, restraint, and respect for privacy. Only a culture of strong self-regulation, public scrutiny, and ethical newsroom

leadership can ensure that journalism serves people, not just profit.

## EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE WITHOUT ETHICS

**Context:** A series of recent incidents—[caste humiliation](#) in elite services, violence by professionals, and ethical collapse in institutions—has renewed debate on the dangers of excellence without ethics.



### About Educational Excellence Without Ethics: Why Education Cannot Be Ethically Neutral?

- **Education shapes power, not just skill:** Professionals wield structural power, and without ethics their decisions can magnify injustice and harm.
- **Knowledge without conscience is dangerous:** Brilliant minds without moral grounding often justify cruelty or corruption as “efficiency.”  
**E.g.** The toxic corporate culture revealed after the EY Pune work-pressure death showed intellect without empathy.
- **Values guide decisions under pressure:** Only [internal ethics](#)—not rules—ensures integrity in ambiguous situations.  
**E.g.** The 2023 NEET paper leak network exposed how students used loopholes when values were absent.

### Symptoms of Excellence Without Ethics in India:

- **Toxic professional conduct:** Educated individuals engage in caste humiliation, bullying and abuse of authority.  
**E.g.** Casteist harassment reported in elite institutes like IITs and medical colleges in 2023–24.
- **Human beings reduced to instruments:** People become file numbers or “targets” in systems

prioritising output over humanity.

**E.g.** Hospital complaints during COVID-19 where patients were treated as “beds” rather than humans.

- **Rankings and meritocracy obsession:** [NIRF ranks](#), placements and JEE/NEET scores overshadow value-education and empathy.  
**E.g.** Coaching hubs openly advertise “AIR ranks” but offer zero socio-emotional learning.
- **Academic dishonesty normalised:** Cheating, proxy projects and plagiarism thrive when outcomes matter more than integrity.  
**E.g.** Mass cheating and manipulation allegations during NEET-UG 2024 exposed systemic ethical collapse.
- **Insensitivity to inequality:** Privileged students remain detached from rural hardship or labour distress.  
**E.g.** Urban students mocking migrant workers’ struggles during the 2020 lockdown became viral.

### Why Ethical Education Matters Specifically for India?

- **High inequality demands high empathy:** A stratified society requires professionals who recognise dignity across caste, class and gender.  
**E.g.** Insensitive comments by a 2024 IAS trainee towards lower staff highlighted empathy gaps.
- **India’s demographic dividend is fragile:** Millions of skilled but ethically shallow youth can worsen corruption and polarisation.  
**E.g.** Frequent fintech scams engineered by highly educated youth show skill without integrity.
- **Democracy relies on civic morality:** Respect for dissent and diversity must be nurtured early to prevent intolerance.  
**E.g.** Campus clashes across universities in 2023–24 reflected inability to disagree peacefully.
- **Rule of law needs ethical anchors:** Fairness and humanity must guide administrators beyond procedural legality.  
**E.g.** The Puja Khedkar UPSC controversy (2024) showed intellectual merit without ethical restraint.

### Key Challenges in Building Ethical Education:

- **Exam-centric culture sidelines ethics:** Boards and entrance exams dominate learning, making ethics seem irrelevant.  
**E.g.** Schools cutting moral science classes to extend JEE/NEET prep hours.

- **Lack of trained ethics educators:** Teachers rarely have tools for case-dialogue, value reasoning or socio-emotional learning.  
**E.g.** Most CBSE schools assign “value education” to untrained temporary staff.
- **Fragmented implementation of NEP 2020:** Strong intent exists, but no clear curriculum, pedagogy or assessments in ethics.  
**E.g.** Schools still rely on outdated “moral stories” instead of modern ethics modules.
- **Campus cultures contradict ethics:** Discrimination or patronage in institutions cancels out classroom ethics.  
**E.g.** Reports of caste bias and harassment at top institutions negate theoretical ethics lessons.
- **Plural society complicates consensus:** Fear of ideological controversy makes institutions dilute value education.  
**E.g.** Schools dropping discussion on gender or inequality to avoid parental backlash.

### Way Forward – Putting Ethics Back at the Heart of Education

1. **National framework for ethical education:**
  - Develop a clear, secular, [constitutional-values-based ethics](#) curriculum for K-12 and higher education, with age-appropriate learning outcomes (empathy in early years, dilemmas and critical reasoning in higher classes).
2. **Integration, not isolation:**
  - Embed ethical questions and dilemmas into all subjects:
    - Science → environmental ethics, AI/biotech dilemmas
    - Economics & business → inequality, worker rights, sustainability
    - History & literature → justice, discrimination, courage, non-violence.
3. **Teacher training & support:**
  - Mandatory ethics and SEL training in B.Ed/M.Ed and faculty development; toolkits for case studies, role plays, reflective writing, classroom dialogue.
4. **Campus culture as a “third teacher”:**
  - Zero tolerance for bullying, discrimination and harassment; transparent [grievance redress](#); student clubs on ethics, debate, social engagement; honour codes

against cheating.

**5. Experiential & community-based learning:**

- Structured field visits, community projects, rural/urban immersion, internships with NGOs and local governments to connect classroom learning with lived realities.

**Conclusion:**

India's biggest risk today is not a lack of talent but a surplus of talent *unmoored* from conscience. If schools and universities keep chasing excellence without ethics, they will produce brilliant minds that may break the very society they are meant to build. Reimagining education as the formation of morally conscious, *intellectually capable and socially just* citizens is no longer a luxury; it is a survival imperative for the Republic.

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