



Mains Practice Question

Case Study

You are a Civil Services aspirant who has cleared the first two stages of the exam and has recently received the interview call letter. On this momentous occasion, you decided to visit a holy shrine near your residence, in order to offer your gratitude to the divine. At the entrance of the shrine, you encounter a disturbing spectacle of exorcism. Two women are being continuously slapped, cursed and shouted upon by a domineering religious man, and their families are standing nearby as silent spectators. You are convinced that these women are suffering from psychological issues but its symptoms are being construed as the presence of evil spirit by the family members. You are deeply moved by the women's plight and you empathize with them.

(a) What choices do you have and how will you respond in this situation?

(b) What are the ethical issues involved in the practice of exorcism? (250 Words)

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Approach

- Introduce by mentioning how society views mental diseases
- Enumerate the choices you have in the above case
- Justify your choice with rational arguments
- Analyse the ethical issues involved in the exorcism

Answer

In Indian society, mental health and psychological issues are generally stereotyped and people afflicted with such problems are socially discriminated against.

It is not only my duty as an aspiring civil servant but also as an educated civilian to prevent and raise voice against any such instance of discrimination and inhumane practices taking place around me. As Swami Vivekananda said 'as long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every person a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them.'

In the above case, women are apparently victims of misplaced beliefs of their family members.

Choices that are available to me are

- I can ignore the plight of the women and go-ahead to offer my tribute in the shrine as I have a great opportunity ahead in my life and should avoid wasting my time on a superstitious practice which is widely prevalent in our country.
- Confront the man who is assaulting women in the name of expelling evil spirits and report the issue to the shrine authority.
- Try to reason with the family members and ask them to seek the help of a medical expert. In case they lack financial resources, assistance could be arranged from a government or private body working for a mental issue.

Amongst the three choices which I have, the third one seems most suitable for an educated person and

aspiring civil servant whose duty is to assist people who harbour irrational beliefs.

The second choice also seems plausible but even if temple authorities forbid this on my complaint suffering of the women will remain unaddressed.

The first option, on the other hand, has moral and ethical limitations as it will amount to forsaking my public duty as a civilian.

Our society continues to suffer from a number of exploitative antiquated practices because the majority of educated and responsible citizens stand as 'silent spectators'. Mahabharata, emphasizing on the duty of a citizen, argues that when a crime occurs, only half of its blame rests on the culprit, one-quarter is shared by co-conspirators and for the remaining quarter, it is the people to blame who stood silently watching it.

Hence, I should listen to the voice of my conscience and positively intervene in the matter. I should also try to convince family members that such a torturous treatment will only worsen the condition of women. Mental issues are completely curable by counseling and as a remedy, they should instead approach a good psychiatrist. If they have financial constraints,

I can assist them in arranging help from Government and NGOs. I would also inform some NGOs who are fighting for the cause of mental issues about such practices taking place near the shrine so that they can follow up such cases and prevent further such instances.

Ethical issues involved in Exorcism

- **Violation of dignity and rights:** These women are being mistreated by an imposter, hurting their self-respect and dignity.
- **Misusing religious belief:** The family members have faith in the divinity of the shrine which is being misused for treating the mental issues.
- **Public apathy:** As devotees do not interfere in such practices.
- **State's role:** Such practices show the failure of the state in generating mass awareness and making mental healthcare accessible.
- **Constitutional morality:** One of the fundamental duties, according to our Constitution, for an individual is "To develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform" which is found lacking here and superstitious beliefs seem to have taken precedence over Constitutional morality.

A report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) revealed that 7.5 percent of the Indian population suffers from some form of mental disorder. But due to lack of awareness, improper health facilities and low availability of psychiatrists, families resort to such superstitious practices. It is the need of the hour to act towards eradicating such social evils.