ESSAY-1 (Sectional-27)

58/125

Date: 02/10/26
Question No. 4

UPSC

Topic

Remarks

SECTION: A

The richest life is not necessarily the life with the most possessions

In the 21st century, humanity has come a long way. From the stone age to the Age of Artificial Intelligence. Back then, technology was gauged with the finesse in pottery-making. Currently, technology is being used for ~~several~~ plethora of material possessions.

In today's times, the richness of life is mostly assessed based on the materialistic goals achieved in different phases of life. That is how the richness of life is being strived for, rather than leading a simple life with minimal

Opening drifts into technology - Stone Age, pottery, AI. None of it is about a 'rich life'. Also loose: pottery belongs to the Neolithic, not the whole Stone Age. Start from the tension in the topic itself. (Sample intro on feedback page.)

This is your real starting point. Good. But 'simple life with minimal possessions' already closes the debate. Topic says 'not necessarily' - leave room for balance.

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and only essential possessions.

In this essay, we will try to delve into what exactly constitutes the richest life? what kind of possesions are people mostly after? Do those possessions matter? If not, what other possessions makes for a rich life? And finally, will look for a synthesis of both dimensions.

To define what a rich life constitutes is not an easy task. As there may be subjective interpretations for the same. for someone, it may be all about material wealth. while for others it may be about all the non-material aspects of life.

Historically, in the Mauryan empire, the founder Chandragupta

Roadmap is fine.
Too many questions one after another though - two clear lines of thesis would do more.
'what other possessions makes' - make.

You say it is hard to define - and then don't define it.
Give a working definition, e.g. Aristotle's eudaimonia (flourishing), Amartya Sen's 'capabilities', or our Purusharthas - artha is one of four aims of life, not the only one.

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Mauryan conquered huge parts of India, under the able guidance of Chanakya. He was not bereft of anything in life. But still he felt empty from within. Once he embraced Jainism, he felt a sense of completion.

Likewise in the Political sphere, the leader of a country is expected to live a lavish life, no less than the great Mauryan king. But our former Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri led an extremely simple life. Because he thought and cared more about India's growth, rather than his own growth. And yet, he was happy and led a rich life.

Good example, fits the topic. But say 'as per Jain tradition' - he became a disciple of Bhadrabahu and went to Shravanabelagola. 'Felt empty from within' is your assumption, not history. Link it to Jain aparigraha (non-possession) - that is the real point.

Good choice. Make it concrete: he bought a Fiat on a Rs 5,000 bank loan; after his death his widow repaid it from her pension. One line of fact beats three adjectives. 'Leaders are expected to live lavishly' - overgeneralised.

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Even though the formula of Economy is equivalent to Empire holds true, it is not necessary that with great wealth accumulation, it has to be used for personal consumption only. Industrialist and philanthrophist, Ratan Tata announced to give lifetime support to the victims of the 26/11 terror attack.

So a rich life is not always about material wealth. Sometimes it is about finding the inner peace, or nurturing a nation, or showing compassion for innocent lives. But there is no doubt that, a financially sound individual will always

'Formula of Economy is equivalent to Empire' - unclear.
If you mean Kautilya's 'kosha-mulo dandah' (power rests on the treasury), say it.

?

✓ Relevant - wealth used for others.
Be precise: Taj Public Service Welfare Trust (2008) supported families of employees and others hit by 26/11. Then name the idea - Gandhi's trusteeship.

✓ Best paragraph so far - balanced.
Develop it: poverty is not 'simplicity'. A minimum of possessions = dignity (food, roof, health, schooling). NITI Aayog: ~24.82 crore people left multidimensional poverty (2013-14 to 2022-23). That is why the topic says 'not necessarily', not 'never'.

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be in a better position to cater to his or her needs and even others needs.

Speaking of needs, what kind of possessions are people mostly after? The ~~question~~ answer to this actually varies from society to society. The kind of values a society inbibes, the kind of possession they will be mostly after.

for instance, the possessions of western society and Indian society are in stark contrast, particularly among the village and tribal societies of the latter.

The western societies are mostly capitalistic in nature,

Okay link.
'Speaking of needs' - a bit conversational for Mains.

Careful - sweeping East vs West binary.
Indian cities are just as consumerist. And Nordic countries are rich AND happiest (WHR 2026: Finland Ist for the 9th year; India 116th).
Use that instead: trust, equality and welfare matter, not things alone.

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as Industrial Revolution originated there only. As a result, they are mostly after tangible material possessions, such as owning multiple houses, cars, etc.

The Indian society however has relatively lesser wants particularly in the village and tribal societies.

While the western societies are mostly developed economies, they constantly suffer from ~~the~~ failed marriages due to high divorce rates. When the institution of marriage breaks down, it immediately affects the mental health of individuals, and if they had sons and daughters, they would suffer

Industrial Revolution, so people want houses and cars? Cause-effect not shown. Too simplistic.

Lesser wants, or lesser means? Don't romanticise rural / tribal deprivation.

Off track. Divorce and upbringing is a different essay - no link shown with possessions. Value judgement on another society, no data. Avoid.

?

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from mental health and upbringing issues too.

Now although mental health issue is very much prevalent in India as well, but it is much lesser compared to other societies. The reason being the values possessed by Indians in general because of our strong cultural roots, keeps us grounded to many traditional values.

For example, in village and tribal societies, there is stronger social cohesion than those living in urban areas. The former believes in collectivism, while the latter believes in

Factually weak.
NMHS 2015-16: about 10.6% of Indian adults had a mental disorder, and most got no treatment. Don't claim 'much lesser' without data.
'although ... but' - use only one.

?

Good idea - relationships and community as 'wealth' (social capital).
Now bring it home: Namghar-centred village life, Raij Mel, community Bihu, shared labour in tribal villages of Assam. Your own state gives the best examples.

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individualism. For village and tribal societies, the possessions of love, care, support and brotherhood matters more, which are mostly non-tangible. But for urban societies, people the possession of material wealth matters more.

So what is the point of accumulating so much of possesions, when it doesn't holistically make our lives rich? The culture of mindless consumerism has exerbated this. The target group is mostly the middle class people, who don't know what they want, and also don't know what they don't want.

Good - 'non-tangible possessions'.
This line could have been your thesis.

Relevant.
But 'middle class who don't know what they want' sounds judgemental. Give evidence instead: EMI and 'buy now, pay later' culture; household net financial savings fell to about 5.3% of GDP in 2022-23 (RBI).
'exerbated' - exacerbated.

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With the advent of festive season, the "Big Billion Days" notification pops up on our smartphones and we mindlessly start buying things that they make us believe are good buys with huge discounts.

These activities in today's times are making us love things and use people. Ideally, it should have been the other way round. As a result, the basic human values of having healthy relationship with self, family and society at large is getting diminished.

Good contemporary example - relatable.
Keep pronouns consistent: 'we ... they make us believe'.

Nice line.
Back it with evidence: Harvard Study of Adult Development (running since 1938) - close relationships, not money, best predict a long and happy life.
'values ... is getting' - are getting.

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The book by Robin Sharma, "Who will cry when you die?" clearly makes one introspect whether possessions matter more than people who matter to us? Whether possessions give more happiness than the one experienced by our any spiritual practices done on a daily basis?

The answer lies in finding the golden mean as popularised by Aristotle. The process to achieve the richest life with or without possession can be delineated in this manner.

Firstly, possessions should always be treated as a

A self-help book is a weak authority for Mains.
Better: Isha Upanishad - 'tena tyaktena bhunjitha' (enjoy by letting go), or Gandhi - 'Earth provides enough for every man's need, but not every man's greed'.

✓

Good - right idea at the right place.
Pair it with the Buddha's Middle Path.
But 'with or without possession' contradicts the golden mean - the mean is 'enough', not zero.

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by-product or means to accomplish something for the greater good. As Gandhiji had said, the best way to know oneself is to indulge completely in the service of others. In this journey, we will get more clarity regarding what possessions actually matter.

Secondly, the process of self-transformation at different phases of life will ensure a more rich and meaningful life. And who knows? Maybe our individual actions can help transform a society too? As Dr. Purnima Devi Barman's endeavour to conserve the Greater Adjutant Stork did.

Good point - possessions as means, not ends.
'indulge completely in' - 'lose oneself in'.
Connect back to Ratan Tata here - that is trusteeship in practice.

'Self-transformation at different phases' - vague. Use the Ashrama idea: brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha, sannyasa - our relation with possessions is meant to change with age.

Good Assam example (Hargila Army, rural women; UNEP Champions of the Earth 2022).
But the link is missing - HOW is her life 'rich'? Purpose, community, respect - say it.

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And thirdly, finding a balance between materialism and spiritualism. While few material possessions are essential for survival, possessing too much makes us selfish by nature.

In conclusion, we can say that the richness of life is definitely not decided by the most possessions. But other aspects of life, such as being grateful for having a loving family and trustworthy friends, having a safe space for self and family, feeding food to the needy people at times, buying them clothes, donating things not used by us anymore. Basically, leading a minimalistic life, devoid of clutter and positive vibes.

This is your core argument and it gets three lines.
Expand: overconsumption and climate - Mission LiFE (2022), SDG 12 (responsible consumption).
'few' - 'a few'.

Conclusion turns into a list of good deeds.
'Definitely not' - the topic said 'not necessarily'.
No link with the intro, nothing forward-looking.
See sample conclusion on feedback page.

Read this again - 'devoid of clutter and positive vibes' means no positive vibes either!
Try: 'free of clutter, full of meaning'.

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FEEDBACK

At a glance

Topic understood
Yes

Relevance
Partly (pp.5-7)

Thesis
Not clear

Dimensions
Narrow

Examples
Good range

Data / facts
Weak

Flow
Average

Conclusion
Weak

OVERALL FEEDBACK

What went well:

- Topic understood; you mostly stay on the right side of it, and p.4-5 shows some balance (a financially sound person can help others too).
- Good spread of examples - Chandragupta, Shastri, Ratan Tata, Purnima Devi Barman, 'Big Billion Days'.
- The 'golden mean' with three steps gives the essay a solution at the end.

What needs improvement:

- Intro opens off-topic (technology, pottery). Thesis never stated clearly.
- Pages 5-7 drift into East vs West, divorce, mental health - unsupported and away from the topic.
- Missing dimensions: environment, economy / well-being (GNH, WHR), poverty and dignity, psychology of consumerism.
- Conclusion is a list, and turns 'not necessarily' into 'definitely not'.

Biggest issue:

"Too many examples, too little argument. You tell stories, but rarely analyse WHY possessions do or don't make a life rich."

What will improve the score:

"Plan 5-6 clear dimensions, argue each with one strong example and one fact, and hold the 'not necessarily' balance till the last line."

FINAL MARKS: 58/125

Detailed feedback and samples on the next pages.

Marks

Content & Understanding	17/35
Analysis & Depth	9/25
Structure & Coherence	11/20
Examples & Enrichment	9/15
Language & Expression	8/15
Conclusion & Overall Impact	4/15
TOTAL	**58/125**

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EVALUATOR FEEDBACK

Topic: "The richest life is not necessarily the life with the most possessions" | Sectional Test 27, Essay 1

Introduction

- First paragraph is about technology - Stone Age to AI, pottery. The examiner learns nothing about your view on a 'rich life' in the first six lines.
- Second paragraph is the actual intro, and the roadmap on p.2 is useful.
- Thesis missing. With 'not necessarily' in the topic, you had to say early: possessions matter up to a point; after that, richness comes from relationships, purpose, health, time and values.

Sample opening for this topic:

> In 1965, the Prime Minister of India bought a Fiat car on a Rs 5,000 bank loan. When he died in 1966 the loan was still unpaid; his widow cleared it from her pension. Lal Bahadur Shastri owned little, yet few Indians have lived a fuller life. At the same time, a family that cannot afford two meals is not 'rich in spirit' by choice. The truth lies in between: possessions can give a good life its floor, but not its ceiling. A rich life is measured by what we are, what we share and what we leave behind - not only by what we own.

Why this works better: it starts with a real, specific story; the thesis is visible in the first paragraph; and it already shows the 'not necessarily' balance instead of rejecting possessions outright.

Body

- Good range - history (Chandragupta), politics (Shastri), business (Ratan Tata), Assam (Purnima Devi Barman), market (Big Billion Days).
- But the body is a chain of examples, not a chain of arguments. State the point first, then the example, then one line on why it proves the point.
- Pages 5-7 (West vs India, divorce, mental health) take almost a quarter of the essay and pull away from the topic. That space should have gone to the dimensions listed under 'Content'.
- The three-step golden-mean answer (pp.10-12) is the best structural idea in the essay, but each step gets only 3-6 lines.

Paragraph-wise observations

- p.1 - Intro off-topic; second para is the real start.
- p.2 - Roadmap fine; definition avoided.
- p.3 - Chandragupta and Shastri: good, but need precision.
- p.4 - Tata: good. 'Economy = Empire' unclear. Last para (financially sound person) - most balanced part of the essay.
- p.5-6 - East-West binary; Industrial Revolution claim simplistic; divorce para off-topic.
- p.7 - Mental health claim unsupported; village cohesion - good idea, no example.
- p.8 - Consumerism relevant; middle-class remark judgemental.
- p.9 - 'Big Billion Days' and 'love things, use people' - good.
- p.10 - Robin Sharma - weak authority; golden mean - good.
- p.11 - Means-not-ends: good. Barman: good, link missing.
- p.12 - Third step too thin; conclusion is a list.

Structure

- Present flow: intro - definition - examples - East/West - consumerism - solution - conclusion. The East/West block breaks the flow.
- Transitions like 'So what is the point of accumulating...' work. Elsewhere paragraphs just start with a new example.

A tighter skeleton for this topic:

1. Why possessions matter - security, dignity, freedom from want.
2. Where they stop adding - hedonic treadmill, consumerism, debt.
3. What else makes life rich - relationships, purpose, health, time, knowledge.
4. Society and environment - overconsumption, Mission LiFE.
5. Indian thought on balance - aparigraha, Purusharthas, Middle Path, Isha Upanishad.
6. Way forward - individual, society, policy (well-being over GDP).

Content

- Understanding of the topic: broadly correct.
- Missing dimensions: environment / sustainability; economy (GDP vs well-being, Easterlin paradox, Bhutan's GNH); poverty - possessions as dignity; psychology (we adapt quickly to new things, so happiness from buying fades); time and health as wealth.
- Unsupported claims: India's mental-health burden 'much lesser'; Western 'failed marriages'; Industrial Revolution causing the urge for houses and cars.

Examples and enrichment

Any 3-4 of these would lift the essay:

- Isha Upanishad - 'tena tyaktena bhunjitha' (enjoy by letting go).
- Jain aparigraha - connects directly to your Chandragupta example.
- Gandhi - 'need, not greed'; trusteeship (connects to Ratan Tata).
- Harvard Study of Adult Development (since 1938) - relationships, not wealth, predict a long, happy life.
- World Happiness Report 2026 - Finland 1st for the ninth year, India 116th. Rich does not automatically mean happy.
- Bhutan - Gross National Happiness.
- NITI Aayog - about 24.82 crore people out of multidimensional poverty (2013-14 to 2022-23): the case FOR possessions.
- RBI - household net financial savings down to about 5.3% of GDP in 2022-23: the EMI culture.
- Mission LiFE (2022) - mindful consumption.
- Assam - Namghar-centred community life; Raij Mel; community Bihu.

Language

- Mostly clear and readable. Not your main problem.
- Slips: 'what other possessions makes' (make); 'exerbated' (exacerbated); 'although ... but'; 'few material possessions' (a few); 'values ... is getting' (are); 'indulge completely in the service' (lose oneself in); 'we ... they make us believe'.
- Last line - 'devoid of clutter and positive vibes' - says the opposite of what you mean. 'Positive vibes' is also too casual for Mains.

EVALUATOR FEEDBACK (contd.)

- Almost every phrase is underlined. Underline 2-3 key ideas per page; when everything is underlined, nothing stands out.

Conclusion

- 'Definitely not' - the topic says 'not necessarily'. You moved from balance to an absolute.
- It becomes a list of good deeds (feeding the needy, donating clothes).
- Does not return to the intro and does not look ahead.

Sample conclusion:

> Possessions are not the enemy of a rich life; they are its foundation, not its fulfilment. A roof, a meal, a book and some savings give security - India's fight against poverty is about exactly that. But beyond a point, more things add less joy and more debt, stress and waste. Chandragupta found completeness in renunciation, Shastri in service, and Purnima Devi Barman in protecting a stork no one else cared for. As India grows richer, the real test is whether we can grow without becoming hollow - whether Mission LiFE's call for mindful consumption becomes a habit and not a slogan. The richest life, then, is the one that has enough - and knows that it is enough.

Why this is better: it keeps the 'not necessarily' balance, ties back to your own examples, moves from the individual to the nation, and ends with a forward-looking, memorable line.

What to do differently in the next essay

1. Write the thesis in the first paragraph, in two lines. No warm-up about the Stone Age or technology.
2. Respect the exact wording - 'not necessarily' means balanced, not absolute.
3. Plan dimensions before writing (individual, social, economic, environmental, philosophical, way forward) and give each a paragraph.
4. Point first, example second, one line of 'why' third.
5. Drop sweeping comparisons (West vs India, urban vs tribal) unless you have data. Never put a number or claim you can't support.
6. Replace self-help sources with Indian thought and hard data (Upanishads, Gandhi, aparigraha, RBI / NITI Aayog / WHR).
7. End by returning to your opening idea and looking ahead - not with a list.

Marks

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