

A woman with glasses and a patterned top is holding a book titled 'UPSC CIVIL SERVICES IAS Prelims'. To her right is a large white speech bubble containing text. To the far right is a 3D rendering of the same book cover, which features the text '29 Years Previous Years UPSC CIVIL SERVICES IAS Prelims Topic-wise Solved Papers 1 & 2 (1995-2023)'.

The most important book which I referred for my Prelims preparation - 29 years Previous Year Questions - This book has topic-wise solved papers for GS 1 as well as CSAT. This book I personally preferred in my preparation journey.

Aishwaryam Prajapati
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Avinash: Hello everyone, I am Avinash Agarwal, I welcome you all on behalf of Disha Publication. In the last 15 years, I have introduced hundreds of toppers of different competitive examinations. And I was always surprised why is that somebody prepared, completes and tops the examination almost effortlessly, and on the contrary, there are lakhs of students who despite burning the midnight oil, despite giving their best, forget about topping the examination they are not even able to clear the examination. So there is something only the toppers know. There is something that the topper is doing that the other students are not doing. We are looking for that very thing today with Aishwaryam Prajapati.

Aishwaryam has cleared or in fact topped UPSC CSE 2023 with an all India rank of 10. She has graduated from NIT Uttarakhand. Then she worked in the entry. She comes from UP and she cleared CSE in her second attempt. Welcome, Aishwaryam, congratulations.

Aishwaryam: Thank you.

Avinash: So before we deep dive into the conversation and in order to set the context right, please share your journey in brief, you know, right from an aspirant to cracking the examination.

Aishwaryam: My CSE journey started in 2021, I had resigned from my job. It was a childhood dream for me. So I had always thought that I will prepare, my inner calling was towards the service only. So I thought that I will do whatever I will do, I at last I will prepare for CASE only.

So when I resigned my job that was the point when I started preparing for UPSC. So I gave 2 attempts. In my first attempt I had been able to clear prelims. Then after that round the

year preparation, this was my second attempt so I cleared this time. Preparation has been basically very much focused and very much oriented towards the studies only.

So I think that 1 and a half or 2 years whatever the time span I devoted in that, complete focus complete concentration was towards the preparation only. No such distractions or something like that happened that time. So focus was the key to my success.

Avinash: Ok, Ashwaryam tell me 1 thing which is very interesting that you said that in the first attempt you could not even clear the prelims. So what was the difference between the first attempt and the second attempt, was it a difference in knowledge or strategy, was it a difference in methodology or the direction itself was wrong, what was the basic difference that in the first attempt you could not clear the prelims? And in the second attempt we not only cleared all the three stages but you know you topped the examination also.

Aishwaryam: In my first attempt, when I came back after designing the job, basically I started very late. So in August I resigned my job and started in October. So one thing I had in mind was that there was seven to eight months time for prelims so in that time either I would be able to do mains or I would be able to do prelims, I would be able to do any one of them. So my strategy was never to clear the prelims in my first attempt. So I didn't focus that much on prelims.

So basically I devoted whatever seven-eight months I had from October onwards my sole strategy was towards mains and optional. So it took me a lot of time to prepare for this and by the time prelims came so like 1 month before so I just started a prelims specific preparation. So this was a part of my strategy that even if I am able to clear the prelims I will not be able to do well in mains. So because of this I gave priority to mains, so naturally the first time I was not able to clear prelims. After that I knew that now next year I have to focus on prelims, I am done with mains .

So this was a part of my strategy. So because of this I was asked many times whether you had depression or anxiety that you could not do it. So my answer remains that it was not my focus at that time, so I knew the mistakes, I had not taken the tests, I had not studied for the prelims, I had not practiced, so it did not happen naturally.

Avinash: So ideally what should one start with because as far as I understand it, be it any exam whether it is prelims or mains, the basic concept which is the core of the subject, the knowledge, the facts, they remain the same and if you think so, because as per my understanding this is a similar thing It also comes in our engineering entrance in which we

have JEE mains, JEE advance. You too have cleared those exams. When we talk about JEE mains and JEE advance, the approach is usually that you prepare for JEE Advance, take JEE Advance as your base. If you are preparing for JEE Advance, then your preparation for JEE Mains is done automatically. But does this hold true in UPSC?

Aishwaryam: This is partially true, not completely true. For strategy, time frame is needed because the syllabus is very vast. A lot of things have to be studied. So we take a decent time of 12 months so that we can complete our syllabus in it. So basically the strategy says that, whatever experience I have after one and a half two years of preparation that we should first start with mains.

A lot of things from prelims are included in mains. But the questions asked for prelims are not asked for mains. Both are very different. So some basic subjects like history, polity, geography, environment are asked in prelims as well. They are asked in mains as well.

So mains is like a super set. So prepare for mains first. Six to eight months of mains preparation along with optional. Then when prelims comes near, three to four months of time, I think is decent enough, sufficient enough to prepare solely for prelims. So it should be a part of strategy that you prepare for the super set first because after clearing prelims, you will only have three months, two and a half months of time, in which you cannot do your mains.

So because of this we have to take this thing forward and naturally when we study about these subjects which are common, then when we start prelims, our 30-40 percent work is already done, we have to focus on the remaining 60 percent.

Avinash: So when you gave the prelims paper in your first attempt, did you come to know that you are not going to clear the prelims?

Yes, I knew while giving the paper, I knew even before giving the paper. And when you were preparing for prelims a month ago obviously you must have given some mock tests too, so were you reflecting in the mock test that maybe I will not be able to clear the prelims? Absolutely, I was definitely reflecting.

I had given eight to ten mock tests. So my marks are very clear, I can tell you the number that I used to get thirty to thirty-five marks. Even in that I used to leave current affairs

because I had studied current affairs for mains. I had read analytical based things. I had not read facts.

I had not memorized it for prelims. So naturally I knew that I will not be able to do it this time. But still there is always a hope in an aspirant that who knows? Who knows I might do it. So I went with that hope but yes, as soon as I saw the paper I got sure that it will not happen.

It will not happen. Yes. So you talked about how ideally one should prepare, keeping mains as your base, in January, February, three four five months before, we should do something like this, we should give a lot of mock tests, so a very effective aspect comes in UPSC preparation that you know, the resources available are over having. Yes. There is too much of content, there is too much of noise, do this, don't do that, I should do this as well.

This is also in the syllabus, that is also in the syllabus and you know it is often very often said that everything unlawfully sky is your syllabus.

Avinash: So how to plan the syllabus, how to decide whether to do this or not to do this because I feel this is also very important.

Aishwaryam: Yes, as much as it is important to know what to do, it is equally important to know what not to do because most of the students are probably in the same trap of how to manage the syllabus, what to do, what not to do. This is how do you go about it, what resources did you use?

So I think the most important thing that you said about what not to do should be focused on because there is a lot of material available, not as much as we need. There is more than enough that is required. So there is a lot of chance of getting distracted in this. So the basic bible that is said for the exam is the syllabus document which you get on the official website. You have to refer to the same syllabus document.

There are many aspirants who do not even know what is in the syllabus of mains? If you ask them about keywords, whether these keywords are mentioned in your syllabus or not, they will not be able to tell. So this is the biggest mistake that you are not looking at the syllabus and you are getting to know from other places that you have to read this, you have to read that. In this you get distracted. Keep the syllabus document with you.

The syllabus is of four to five pages. You have to take photocopies of it subject wise. Whatever you read, whatever source you pick up, you should see that what keyword is written in my syllabus? Is this keyword in that source? Secondly, whenever you pick up a new thing, a new book, always repeat one thing in your mind that will I be able to read this entire book for a whole year?

Will I be able to revise it ten times in a year? Because one basic thing that children do not understand is that whatever you read, you have to read it again and again. Reading it once is equal to not reading it at all. So whenever you have to take up a new source or someone tells you about a new mentorship, you have to first see how much content am I getting from this book which is mentioned in my syllabus? Am I getting two pages of content?

Am I getting one paragraph? Am I getting ten pages of content? When you analyze this, you will evaluate each source parallelly by looking at your syllabus. Then you will understand that there are many things which are not of use to you. Without which you can prepare very easily.

Secondly, one should never run after content. It should never happen that if you see a new question, you now search for its book. Wherever the thing is given, for example if we solve the prelims paper, we find a question which we do not know. We did not read it in our book, did not read it in our reference book. So now the children become anxious that now find its source. Well, it was in this book, so buy this book. This thing should never be done.

The answer is written at the back of that booklet paper. You see the answer, note it down, remember it, your work is done. So in this way your knowledge will increase without source addition. So this is a smart strategy that you do not have to increase your sources, you do not have to increase your work. Wherever the information of the thing is, even for mains, if you get a question, you gave mock, practice paper and you do not know it, then you should not go searching for material for it that there is a coaching compilation.

Notes of this friend of this institute, of that institute, of this friend. It is given at the back in the model answers, remember it, your work is done. So basically it is very important to pay attention to the syllabus. It is said that the entire UPSC syllabus covers hundred percent of everything within the boundaries of the syllabus but still when you see the syllabus daily then your boundary becomes very narrow for preparation.

Avinash: So very interesting things are coming out because as I said earlier also that there is too much of noise, so we have to stay focused and understand very closely what to do and what not to do and for taking this decision our main source document is the syllabus document and as Aishwaryam told that if you proceed with this paper by assuming that it is the one who decides what to do, then you will see that your boundary is getting done perfectly and I understood two more things that it is not learning fast, it is not running in the right direction, it is not about quantity, it is about quality of move, we should not run behind the source of every question.

When we run behind then there is no end to it, everything is driven by our syllabus document and letters are not complicated things. As I have talked to Aishwaryam, I feel that this is a very simple and easy way. You can not only prepare for this exam easily but can also crack it, provided you are focused. So Aishwaryam, you said one more thing which was very interesting that while choosing the resources we should not only see if we will be able to read it but also see if we will be able to revise it ten times or not. Even before this, in the beginning we had discussed that tax based questions come in prelims, so revision is very important for that.

Avinash: So is note taking important for revision or not? Did you make notes or not? Is the technique of note taking different for Mains and prelims or not? Yes. Did you make notes for all the subjects or just for optional, what is your take on this?

Aishwaryam: Revision, as you said, is very important. My motto for this exam was 3P33P3R so practice, practice, practice revision revision revision. So I had made notes for this revision but it again depends on what to make notes of. For example if a child makes notes of spectrum, there is a book on modern history called spectrum. So if you see that book, it is such a thick book but in that book things are given in such a concise manner point wise, so that book is already in a notes form.

Lakshmikant ji's book Polity, each and every line is important. So if you sit to make notes of it, then again you will write a whole book. So you have to see what to make notes of and for what? This will be known from which book is giving you how much content. Your exam uniform.

Right now I know that the whole book of spectrum's modern India modern history book is important. Ten to twelve questions come, I have to remember each line, so I will not make notes. I will read the same book ten times. I am not able to decide whether something is important or unimportant from that but for example, I must have read a reference book on

geography for GC. After reading it, I felt that this topic is not given in my NCERTs, so I have to study only this topic, so I made notes of that.

What happened because of this is that one book got eliminated. Your mental burden of having ten books for diary and geography is over. You pasted a page in your NCERT or made a thin copy. By using this technique, you see less sources. So it is not that you do not expand the sources at all.

You should definitely do it. But make notes of things that are useful to you from that book. Whichever book you feel that only this paragraph in it, ten pages, twenty pages out of 250 pages, only these fifty pages seem important to me. So you can make notes. The technique of making notes is very different for prelims and for mains. First of all, you should know what is asked in prelims.

For that you have to see PYQs. You know that facts will be asked. Okay, some static thing will be asked. You will not be asked any analysis that what are its pros, cons, issues, solutions, compare all these things for mains. So this framework pros and cons, challenges, issues, solutions, way forwards, good initiatives, what is happening at local level?

This entire framework is for mains. So when you make notes, you will make it keeping this framework in mind for mains. For prelims you just need to focus on the facts that okay this is constitution by body. Under which article it has been formed. You need to learn that article.

So in this way when you will be able to delete what is asked in mains? What is asked in prelims then your note making will automatically be separated for both. I had not made too many notes, I had made notes for optional. Basically I had made my notes of current affairs. I had taken out the things that were useful to me from the current affairs booklet of twenty four months and made separate notes for prelims and mains.

I had not made much notes from other books etc. because I used to read them directly. There is another big misconception. We just talked about how to select resources, how to study, what to do with revision and note picking.

Avinash: Another issue related to these is whether coaching is necessary or not? Because I talk to many students who say that sir I did not have money for Delhi or I did not have money for Allahabad and many students leave their city, their village, their parents

thousands of kilometers away and spend years here wondering what is the role of coaching? Is it needed or not and how much study is really needed if you want to stay for one and a half years and prepare well. What was your study routine and how much study did you do or did you join any coaching?

Aishwaryam: The most important thing I would like to say here is that Delhi does not always start after home.

After home there are many things that you can do there itself. What I mean to say is that it is not necessary that if you want to study, you have to come to Delhi. I did my studies by taking a room next to my house. So I took a room next to my house and my family members told me to go to Delhi, Papa told me to go to Delhi. But I did not because I did not feel the need.

So those who do not have such privilege that they can study in their house. They have a separate room. If there is any such thing, it is disturbance. They can take a room in their city. One big benefit I personally had from this was that I never felt cut off.

So Delhi does not start after home. You can study even by staying there. The second thing is about coaching, coaching is a very subjective question whether coaching is needed or not. The one who understood the nerves of the exam, the one who understood this syllabus, I particularly trusted the syllabus. I was so determined that if the keyword in the study is secularism, I will get two-three pages of notes on secularism.

My work will be done. This was my thought process, so I did not need coaching because coaching would personally make me feel burdened, travelling. All these travel things, time being wasted, discussions, all these things seemed very unnecessary to me and because I had grasped the nerves of the exam that this is the syllabus, I have to prepare within its boundaries and I used to self-evaluate myself by taking tests and when I got good marks, I was assured that my preparation was on the right track. At my personal level, I had done research that okay, if my option is sociology, then these are all the books for it, these are all the resources. I will see what I need?

Or I listened to the strategy of four toppers and decided that this subject is my option. When you can do all these things at your own level, then you do not need coaching at all. Ultimately, whatever you have to study in it. It is a very practical, very real thing that you have to memorize things. It is not a maths thing or any technical thing that you need someone to explain to you.

So it depends on how easily you understood the exam, it depends on that whether coaching is necessary or not but it is not necessary at all. The way people study, if they do not get motivation, they are not able to remain disciplined. They feel that if there is any pressure on them, how will they give pressure. Sure sure sure, sure, sure, sure, sure, sure, sure, sure, sure, sure, yes then I will study. So when you have self discipline, you are sincere, you know the syllabus, you know the sources, everything means more than enough that is required is available in the market, then I did not feel the need for coaching at all.

Avinash: How much study I mean when you had taken a room next to your house, then how many hours did you study, I mean your entire preparation must have taken one year. Yes, so approximately how many hours daily?

Aishwaryam: I used to devote eight to ten hours very comfortably to studies. It is said that hours are not important.

But my way of studying was that because I knew that if I am studying then productivity is mine. I am studying sincerely. I am not studying just for hours, so I used to study by setting a timer. So when that timer would show eight hours in my whole day, after that I would stop studying and do whatever refreshment and all these things, I used to take breaks in between, particularly I used to track my time, so according to that, if I tell you, I used to study for eight to ten hours round the year.

And naturally when your prelims are approaching, mains are approaching, those hours increase, so twelve thirteen hours on an average revision etc. sounds very easy, twelve thirteen hours sounds a lot, but the one who has prepared for the whole year and revises for a month can easily revise for twelve thirteen hours. So time has to be given, there is an issue of time because the syllabus is very huge. So I am having a very interesting thought at this time, then you know what Aishwarya just said, I picked two things about her that she had grasped the pulse of the exam. How easily you are able to understand the exam. Yes.

That in this, we have to first understand the exam. Then you and your preparation have to become one. If you and your preparation become one, then hours do not matter at all. You can be excited, enthusiastic and energetic even after twelve hours and if you and your exam do not become one, then you can get frustrated even in two hours, otherwise you can. Absolutely.

So we have to learn how to ride with the way not against the way and for us to do that I would again come back to the same thing what is important is not the coaching what is

important is that whether you understood the pulse of the exam or not, you are able to understand the exam so easily and for that I will come back to what Aishwarya said that our syllabus should be our bible, our syllabus should be the guide of our entire preparation in a way, everything should drive from the syllabus rather than taking the sun from here and the sun from there.

Avinash: You said one more thing in this that you used to evaluate yourself in the tests. So what was the role of testing? In that second attempt where in the first attempt you said that you had given only eight to ten tests of prelims. So in the second attempt how many tests were there for prelims, what was the rule of testing?

How did you self evaluate yourself? In what way did you use your papers, how did you improve your score? Especially how did you self evaluate in the mains paper?

Aishwaryam: So test papers have played a very big role in my preparation because I did not take any external guidance coaching and I was all alone in this preparation. I did not have any friends who were preparing.

So I had to ensure that the preparation is going in the right direction. So writing tests tells you whether your preparation is in the right direction or not. You are studying at home, if you write a test and you are scoring in it, then it means that your preparation is in the right direction. In the first prelims, I had given eight to ten tests for the prelims. So in this prelims, I had taken 150 tests.

Yes, I had taken 150 tests. The method of taking tests is also that it is not necessary to take only tests. The most important thing in taking tests is those things which you do not know. You have to focus only on that which you do not know. So while taking the test one should never get depressed or egoistic like I studied it, I was not able to understand the test, it is bad, I have heard this a lot from people that the test itself is bad, it does not have any standard, that is it.

So all these are useless things if I say it in clear words. I took tests from any institute and 150 from n number of institutes, I took tests from all the institutes in Delhi. The main focus was on the things that I don't know. If I took 50 out of 100 questions and I don't know 50 then my focus was only on writing those 50 in my copy and memorizing them. Yes, there is no point behind their sources.

Not at all, never. Whatever I wrote from them became such a thick book, it became a complete source, it had so much dense information. That information helped me a lot in my prelims exam. Secondly, there is always a way to test yourself. Secondly, when you sit for

the prelims exam, you are not able to bear the pressure and anxiety of that time and another thing is that the role of knowledge is very less there.

My father used to tell me that prelims is just a game of the mind, so I used to say to him a lot that no, it doesn't happen like this, it is not a game of the mind. You will do it only if you know how to do it, but when I sat for prelims, I realised that after twenty to twenty five questions, no one is sure whether the question is right or wrong. So it is all a game of your mind there. How coolly and how composed you are able to think. You have to practice that at home.

Avinash: You took the test, you sat for two hours, you took the test, you saw how many you were wrong, how many you were right, how many you were sure of that you marked. How much guess work you did, how much of that was wrong.

Aishwaryam: When I did this calculation in my ten to twenty papers, I got an idea that my guess work is very bad, so I should not guess too much, otherwise I will be deducted negative marks. When I attempt eighty to ninety questions, there are high chances that my cutoff is almost cleared. In this way, you have to analyse and self evaluate.

No coaching can teach you this. You will have to sit for it yourself. For Mains, I again wrote a lot of tests, eighty to ninety GS tests of three hours of full length and apart from that I wrote thirty tests of sociology and ten to fifteen essays. So the role of writing was very big for me. I had written my first three-hour test within a month of starting preparation. I was not at all afraid of my marks in the test. Even though this year I cleared the prelims, my marks were sometimes fifty, sometimes sixty, sometimes seventy, sometimes even ninety, but sometimes mostly like this.

But I was not afraid because my focus was that I do not want to score in this, I want to take the content out of it. I want to learn. I want to learn. I want to take my preparation forward. I want to add value to my preparation in it.

So I started writing very early. One advantage I got from that was that I had a lot of time to improve my writing. If I did not write the introduction correctly, did not write the conclusion correctly and many students also say that testing should be given sometime, our syllabus is not ready, studies are not complete, then what should we do with writing? This is a very big myth. It is natural that you cannot write a test from the first day but thinking that I will write it once my syllabus is complete is wrong.

In UPSC you will not feel even a day before that your test is complete. Even a day before Mains I did not feel that my syllabus is complete. But you have to show that confidence that you have studied history, so try writing a three hour test of history. You will not write it until you get 60 out of 250 marks in the first test and in the last test I wrote I got 120, 125 marks. Getting from 60 to 120, 125 was very hard for me. But because I started writing earlier, I got to know the mistakes earlier, I had time to correct them and to practice.

So do not start too late. So everyone makes mistakes, so even you make mistakes. Someone has rightly said that making mistakes is nature. Yes, accepting is culture and correcting is progress. So everyone makes mistakes.

Avinash: Absolutely. Another thing I understood from this conversation is that apart from the subject, suppose you are apart from the academic aspect, the second emotional aspect, the mental aspect, the mindset game is very important because actually as you said, after twenty, twenty five, thirty questions, every child has every question, so it is a very important mindset game that what are you thinking, am I alone in my preparation or am I enough alone? This mindset is very important for you. So Aishwarya, we are relating to this question since you were also alone in your preparation, you were living separately, you said that you did not have any friends who were preparing. So how do you, you know manage emotions like fear, anxiety, depression, so that you do not fail, your preparation does not go waste, people from society, now how do you manage all these emotions and continuously maintain movement?

Aishwaryam: All these anxiety, depression, small low points come to every aspirant but as I told you that I used to live near my home, so there is a cut off, emotional cut off of parents, family, friends, I did not get cut off from them. So I used to stay around them all the time. So I am asking this out of curiosity about the room you had taken.

Avinash: Yes yes yes. So is it just for studies or is the room also there?

Aishwaryam: Everything, room is like you are two minutes from here, just look at the clock. So in a way it became an independent house, you just got food and drink from your home or do you go home? I used to go home while walking. Sometimes in the evening papa would come with tea, in the morning mummy would come with breakfast, sometimes I would go myself. So cooking and washing, everything. Yes, everyone had to stay in my room. The entire setup was mine. Another interesting thing is. Bed etc. everything was mine, I used to go only to eat food.

Avinash: And which city are you talking about?

Aishwaryam: Lucknow city. Talking about Lucknow. Yes, I had taken a room there, so I never got cut off too much. So in whatever low period used to come, one thing in that, when family members live nearby, you do not feel bad too much. Secondly, I found a practical way to deal with all these things. When I got to know that I scored good marks in the test, then I

had no doubt whether my preparation was going well or not. I am alone. I did not study this. I did not study that. That was my benchmark.

Aishwaryam: That is why I say every time that writing tests and solving tests has a very big role in my preparation because I made it a benchmark to see whether I am able to study properly or not. So if I have written a test and I see that three thousand children have written it and I am at number two or three hundred in it, then it means my preparation is going well. Yes. But if I am able to do the test, then this self evaluation is very important. Children become interim sorry intimate with many things. They become so and they feel that they get scared. But they don't evaluate on the thing on which they have to evaluate. So the benchmark of evaluation is your test series. If you studied, you will perform, it is a sure thing. It is a very sure and practical thing, if you studied, then you will get good marks in the test series. It can happen sometimes, it can fluctuate but if you do it regularly then you will be able to get the same bank.

No, but many times it used to happen that I get very bad marks or good marks, so the feeling that would come at that time, of fear or anxiety or fear or failure, I was talking about those emotions.

Aishwaryam: Yes. Because in the preparation of many aspirants, these emotions are dominant. Yes, yes. I would like to be very honest here that I did not face such things in my preparation. So I will not be able to tell much about it, but I know why I did not face these things because as I told you, whenever I used to give a test, I did not focus much on its marks. If I gave a test of two hundred and fifty marks for mains and let's say I got even seventy marks. I used to get around seventy-eighty marks. In the end, I started getting marks above hundred. My focus again remained the same. Because I referred less sources. So the copy of the games used to go for checking. It used to go for checking. Yes. Do I scan it and upload it? Yes, I used to scan it and upload it in the room. It used to come back after being checked. I used to see its model answer. Whichever question I got wrong, I did not get it right. From there, I again made my content from the test series of mains. So all in all, my focus was more on how much my content was getting added without picking up any extra additional source book. So when I started doing this, when I came into this cycle, my marks automatically improved, so I did not face that low period during my preparation. My focus was not even on it much and because I was studying sincerely, I did not have time to think about why I got less marks in it because I had already taken the value from my work. So one thing is coming out very clearly that just is a very important aspect of any preparation and it is consensual to believe that those who think that if their syllabus is not complete yet, they will start the test later. They are afraid or hesitate to give the test, they hesitate to evaluate themselves that this is not the right approach. You can start the test only after some time of preparation. Test should be a part of your preparation. Other important things will come out, instead of just giving the test, we have to ask ourselves that we have to assess the test correctly. Unless any test of yours is telling you where you are, where you have to reach, where is the gap, how can you cover that gap? So it is not a test, it remains as your question bank in a way. That is, there are many students who write the test, leave it, do not come deeply after analyzing it. You can also get good marks in the test, so you can remain happy on reciting.

Avinash: Even if you score low in the test, like Aishwarya also said that even if some beautiful person scores less, but as long as the test is showing you the way forward, this is the way forward, then there is no need to be upset at all. Very interesting and very very powerful inside. One more thing I would like to ask you, the feeling of guilt that an aspirant has, a lot of things like, today I read too much, today I watched this OTP series, I put a lot of time on YouTube, time was wasted, I could not study, I could not focus, this feeling is of guilt, not that I enjoyed today, I was left behind, how to handle this feeling of guilt?

Aishwaryam: I also used to have this feeling of guilt. So guilt comes when your distraction becomes too much. So one of my parcel ways to reduce distractions was that I used to spend more time with books.

I found reading from a book, seeing things from a book more beneficial compared to videos, this ten-minute crash course video, etc. I used to stay away from all these things. Only if and when I was required to understand a topic. This happened for one thing. Secondly, naturally my screen time was very less. So whatever enjoyment I had was outdoors or I liked to be a guardian so I used to go to my home and if I spent one or two hours on it, I would feel guilty that I took so long today. It took that much time but again, as I said, that is why I had set a timer in the beginning. I used to work according to the time so if I knew that my target was that eight hours should appear on my timer. So if it was six hours, then I had the guilt of those two hours but again I used to try to study for half an hour every day in the next day. This can be said to be a very micromanagement thing, this should not be done but my method was that I used to study for half an hour every day because I did not do my work so it means that there was stress and pressure somewhere, it is definitely there because the biggest drawback in this is of time. We never feel that everything of ours is prepared. If you never feel like this, then that stress remains. So whenever it used to show me in my time that today I studied only for three hours, only for five hours. So the next day I used to study for ten hours instead of eight but with productivity. I was sincere, so it was not just to appear in the time zone. So that stress used to remain. Now if you are doing ten instead of eight, then naturally you used to go home and talk to them for half an hour, so naturally I reduced that. Whenever such things used to come, but gradually I also learnt that taking guilt is not at all necessary. I, I personally feel that the more happily you enjoy this preparation, the less burden you will feel. So many times I used to go to my home deliberately, used to spend a lot of time.

Avinash: So parents must have said many times that why don't you go to the PDF, will you teach me a little? Didn't they say this?

Aishwaryam: No, no, they never said this, rather they used to call me come come. So because they knew that if it is in the room, then it must be lying there. So you have to assess yourself that how much time you wasted and where. There are some such things, for example, if I am taking care of my trees and plants, then I do not feel much guilt in that, but if I do something like using YouTube or Instagram, then I feel more guilt. Where is a very interesting thing coming from that whenever we prepare for any exam, obviously breaks are needed but what we are doing in these breaks is very important.

Avinash: Yes. Many times I have seen students who finish a session of three hours, after that we spend an hour on Instagram, look for jeans shops, so if you think about it in another way, the way Aishwarya Prajapati is saying that she used to pursue her hobby and earn money. Think that when you are coming after completing a session of three hours, then your brain is honestly taxed and if you are using YouTube and Instagram, then it is not going to refresh you, it in fact can bring negativity or some other negative feeling inside you and your mind also needs rest.

Aishwaryam: Yes, yes. So every now and then you should also pick up some habits that reduce screen time and connect you with nature and environment so that you can be energetic and work as a booster. So my refresh, refreshments and breaks are very important. You should never think like this. Even though I used to study by setting a timer, I could study for one and a half hours or two hours at a time. So you can do anything for ten minutes, fifteen minutes in that duration. Suppose I used to take three or four rounds of my house. I have a pet and I used to play with it. What are all these things? They feel very relaxed. You get to know later when you leave your hobby and someday I even Instagram. After checking Instagram, I get to know that yesterday I was feeling so good, why am I not feeling good today? So all these things are a technique to keep your mind in a very peaceful place.

Avinash: Yes. So this is a very important point. When we are taking a break, the basic purpose of the break should be to boost us in a way, to re-energise us and that is why I would like to sincerely advise all aspirants to do this and Aishwaryam also said the same that she used to garden with her pet. You can also talk to your parents but don't indulge yourself in social media because I strongly feel that even social media, you are thinking that it will energise you, freshen you up, so the chances of that happening to me are probably very less.

Aishwaryam: Absolutely.

Avinash: Any three secrets or three habits or three principles which help you in achieving whatever you have been able to achieve. First was focus, complete focus. I knew what I had to do now? My main goal, my main aim, I knew it was always in my mind that I have to do this, I have to do this. For this I have to study every day.

Aishwaryam: It will not happen in one day, two days, two months, four months. You have to maintain focus, dedication. Other practical things you have to keep in mind are that it is time consuming so you have to give the time. Never think that if I have studied for eight hours today then I will not study tomorrow. Today I have read this book, now I have read this book. Never think that if I have read this book then this is done. That book has to be read for the whole year. So this repetition of things is the repetition of the things that you do to achieve your small goals. You wrote a test, read a book but you have to read it every time. This repetition is too much to be in discipline. No one should need to tell me to study or do that. No one ever told me to study or why I never stayed at home so late. Self discipline, focus, dedication is very important. Another practical thing that worked for me was that I avoided too much discussion. I did not have any friends and I used to be very active on Telegram groups, channels etc. So I had faith in myself that I got marks in my test. My work was done.

When you start discussing too much, many such things come to your mind, many thoughts come. You start seeing many choices that someone told me this, someone told me that. So always, in preparation, the more you indulge in yourself and in clear words, the more you stay along. Meaning, stay alone so much that you do not get distracted, that thing helped me a lot. I thought the same thing and I still think the same thing that if I, I knew four or five people who were preparing or going to coaching or I was in Delhi, that means this is my personal opinion that either I was in Delhi or I was going to coaching or I was doing this, then probably I would not have been able to do it as easily as I did. Secondly, there is one more thing which has helped me a lot now. Whenever you have to start preparation, the first thing you have to read is NCERT of class six, you have to read NCERT of class seven, eight, nine to ten, so the thing which is so easy to start with, which you had read at the age of ten or twelve and you are reading it again for UPSC, then you should make it in your mind that this exam is not tough at all. So this was in my mind that when you start preparing, I had it in my mind that since I have started from NCERT, it is called the toughest examination in India. But it is not that a tough exam is only when you are in the wrong direction. If you are in the wrong direction, then even the easiest thing will seem tough to you. But when you get the right direction, it can go away. But it cannot be tough.

Avinash: It can be tiring but it cannot be tough. The main thing in this is that the syllabus is very long and it will take time. But it is not that such things are tough. If someone has eleven or twelve months and he has studied and done all the things that should have been done, then maybe he may not be able to do it that year. So does it mean that the students who have been studying for five or six years are going astray somewhere?

Aishwaryam: They are absolutely going astray. Either they are missing out on their syllabus somewhere. Or they are studying those things in excess which are not asked in this exam. For example, I tell you a very practical thing that whatever you have studied, I know that only this much will be asked for prelims. Its history, geography, all these things are very trivial things which you think are not asked in the exam. You got to know that by looking at PYQ. It is not necessary to go into the depth of everything. There is no need to study everything in great depth. This is a very generalist exam, you should know a little bit about everything. Your focus should never be that if someone tells me this point, I will never be able to debate with them with four people. I myself also say the same that if I am given a topic, I will not be able to debate with four people as much as those people may be able to do but because I have studied as much as I was to be asked in the exam. This is a basic thing which has to be remembered, read only as much as is asked in the exam. You know that the weightage of international relations is very less. So why waste time on it? You know that world history is very rarely asked. Why study it, what happened here, what happened there? It is a very practical thing. Curiosity has to be controlled. A very basic factor is that when we study science and technology, environment, things happening around us, then we develop curiosity. What happened before? What happened before this? Right? So, control your curiosity about all these things, read only as much as will be asked in the exam. Even when my father used to ask me about something, if there is news of some international relations, something is happening, some new scheme, or anything that I don't know, I used to tell him that I didn't study because it is not that much for my exam, I just know the names. So, one should not take it as ego that I am preparing for UPSC, so I should know everything. So I have got a very interesting insight that UPSC exam is not tough. The path can be long, the path can be tiring but it is not difficult at all. It was very very interesting and very very

insightful. I personally have learned a lot of things and I would like all the aspirants and viewers who are watching to understand each and every thing in detail, listen and implement it in their preparation because nothing will happen by just understanding and listening. I will summarise that the exam is not tough, the path can be long, the path can be long, the path can be far but the exam is not tough and for this it is important for you to have a grasp on the pulse of the exam, only then you can prepare with ease. Only then you and your preparation can become one and when you and your preparation become one then even after studying for ten to twelve hours you do not have to study, you remain so enthusiastic and excited.

Avinash: Yes, absolutely. Thank you Aishwaryam.

Aishwaryam: Thank you. Thank you.