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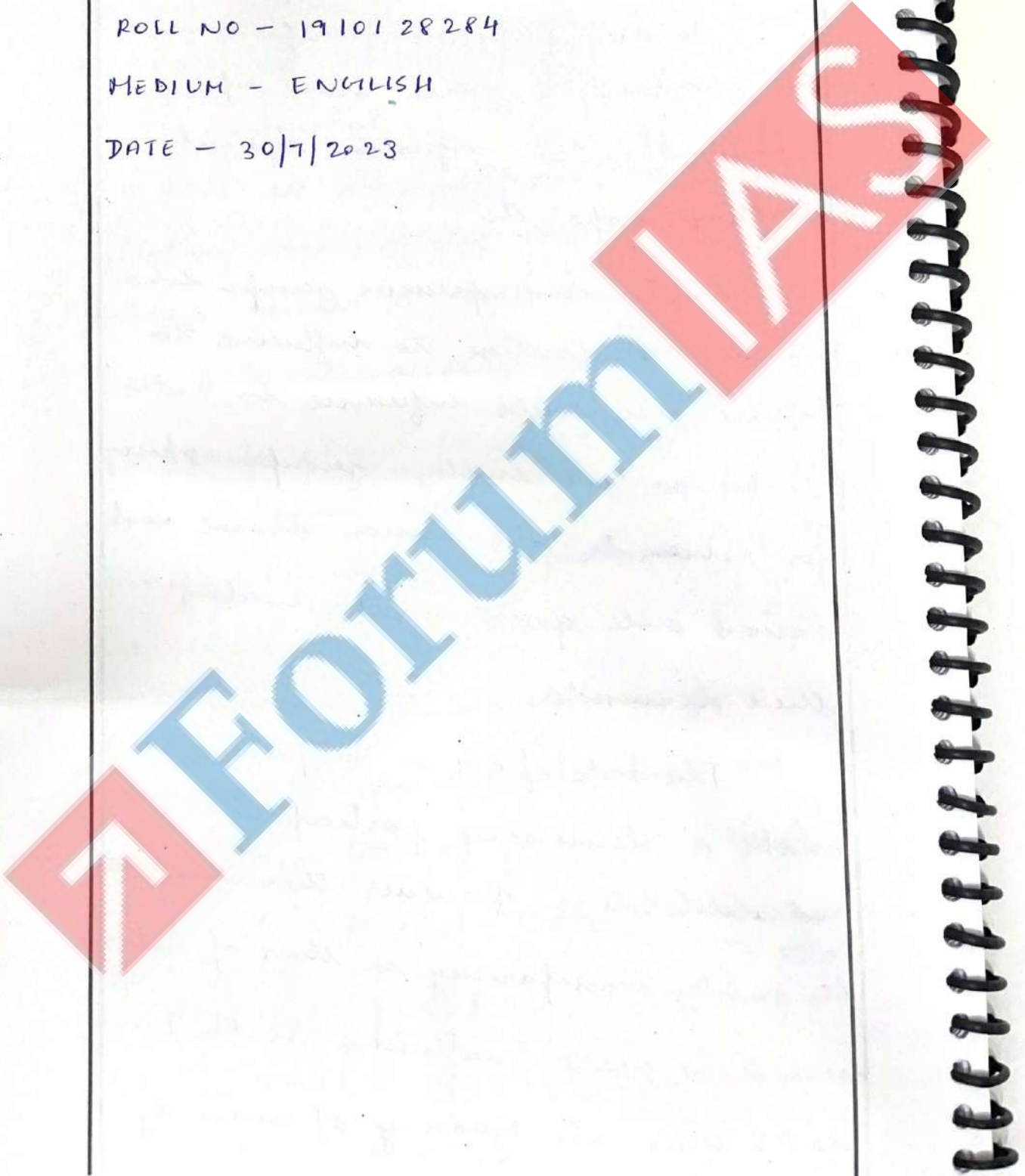
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The ultimate renewable energy is human ingenuity.

Recently everyone was amazed at the news coming in from Amazon rainforest a group of 4 children who had been stranded post an airplane crash appeared alive after 10 days. Mind you the rainforest harbours some of the most treacherous places for a human to live. It has strenuous terrains, wild animals from hyenas to jaguars and varieties of venomous snakes. In spite of this that the children came out safe possibly points to human ingenuity to survive in the most difficult of situations. Their parents informed that the children were ~~trained~~ ^{accustomed} to living in nature, having a way to consume naturally available foods.

Today we see humans inhabit a range of extreme environments. From Negrito tribes in the jungles of Andaman to metropolitan suburbs of Singapore

only a narrow stretch of ocean water separates them. The reason for a single species to thus survive in entrenchment, is testament to human ingenuity and power of human mind to devise solutions to complex problems.

In this essay we will talk about how human ingenuity is the ultimate renewable energy. How the power of humans to constantly innovate, learn, unlearn has led to evolution of our civilizations and societies.

The power of human mind has been acknowledged by philosophers like Socrates and Plato. Plato talks of having a philosopher as a king. Such a person would embody wisdom which would enable him to be uncorrupt and save his kingdom faithfully. Socrates stated that ability to think is more important than information or knowledge.

In the Indian context H.N. Roy a communist mentioned that human mind is the most important means of production as it produces ideas. He talked about establishing a society based on power of human reason and using science as a liberating force.

Historically we witness how humans have constantly renewed themselves and the way they live. There existed a slave society in ancient Rome. It existed to fulfill economic tasks and also to provide freedom to masters to perform important tasks. There also existed a feudal society with feudal lords and vassals in large kingdoms under a single monarch.

With the advent of industrialization and modernity there was a growth of ideas. Such ideas recognized the value of each individual like Immanuel Kant talking about need to respect

Human dignity and all humans being equal in terms of morality. Such ideas eventually led to American and French revolutions which established ~~to~~ republics ultimately acknowledging an individual's rights.

If humans have evolved the way their societies are governed they have also found ways to protect themselves from nature. ~~It~~ There is no better example of this than the advances made in healthcare.

We have heard of pandemics like black plague, Spanish Flu. However now plague and flu are hardly causes of concern for humans.

The 2020 coronavirus similarity of them a major challenge to humans. Within months the virus spread all around the globe. Some hyperbole skepticism was thrown that this probably means the end

of civilisations as we know it. However humans responded back. Lockdowns were imposed, sometimes severely harsh to control the virus. People locked up in their homes found ways to work, children took to digital learning. Mind you this doesn't mean that it didn't create problems. The divide between haves and have-nots further widened. However broadly humans were able to overcome.

Vaccine development which would sometimes takes decades were done in a matter of months. Approvals were fast-tracked, government support was forthcoming through programmes like Operation Warp Speed in USA.

Vaccines have similarly helped us to overpower deadly infections. Things like smallpox, polio have been broadly confined to the past. We have treatments available for cancer now. Technologies like CRISPR-Cas9 give us hope that

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many genetic disorders like sickle cell anaemia are now curable.

Similarly climate change and predictions of global warming spell doom for our planet. It has been predicted that ice sheet collapse might trigger sea level increases which would render many coastal areas uninhabitable. In India warming ~~has~~ can depress living standards by around 20%.

However we do see efforts being made to overcome this. There is an increasing shift to cooperation of on climate change. The UNFCCC accords have now almost universal acceptance.

Scientific solutions to lessen the impact of climate change involve geo-engineering to place a mirror in space to lessen the amount of

sun's heat. Though highly speculative of its impact, and side-effects unknown it shows how far the human mind can think.

Carbon dioxide emissions have been major cause of climate change. ~~Capture~~ Carbon capture and sequestration offer possible pathways. To reduce the amount of vehicles there is a shift to biofuels, hydrogen powered vehicles etc.

If science has been a major frontier to demonstrate human ingenuity we cannot ignore the political and social aspects.

The Indian freedom movement specially the gandhian phase shows how a subjugated people brought

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run down on massive British empire.

Gandhi was a mass psychologist. He knew that masses had limited capacity of violence. Thus through non-violence movement he brought masses into fold of freedom movement.

Thereafter to break the myths of benevolent despotism, he undertook the civil disobedience movement to expose evils of the cray like imposition of salt tax, tormenting of peaceful political prisoners.

Finally through the Quit India movement he dealt a final blow to British ambitions of staying on.

This shows how a determined people willing to make sacrifices devised ingenious solutions and challenged

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one of the most powerful despotic governments.

Post independence chances of success of Indian democracy were considered very slim. Due to its huge diversity it was felt that balkanization was inevitable.

However not only has India survived it is on course to become 2nd. largest economy 80 years after independence.

The reasons for success is due to great ingenuity shown by politicians in dealing with diversity. Indian asymmetric federalism has been able to accommodate diverse demands like linguistic states; protection of tribal rights (Art 5, 6) etc.

Similarly ethnicity which is

usually a diverse force has united Indians. Different castes have formed alliances to stake claim to power like ATGAR in Gujarat, Yadavs + Muslims in UP etc. This shows greater democratisation and has been hailed as India's silent revolution.

Similarly Indian model of secularism has preserved harmony in a society where religion is a big part of public life.

In recent times new welfareism has been used to reduce widespread inequalities like LPB cylinders, housing, tap water connection. Through its digital public infra (UPI, Aadhar) India is showcasing how good governance is achievable with limited resources.

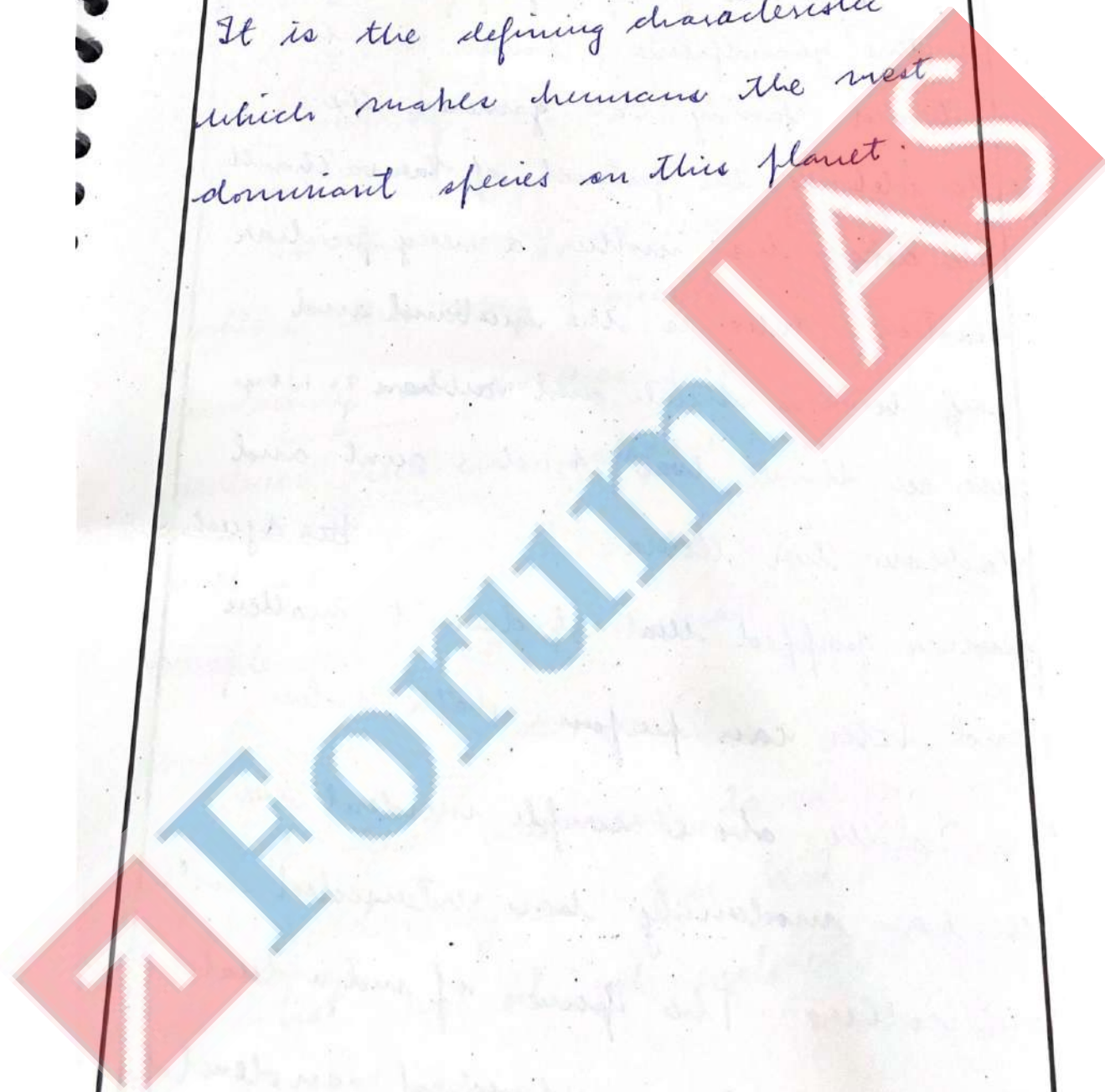
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Human ingenuity has thus been
visible in different spheres of life.
It is the defining characteristic
which makes humans the most
dominant species on this planet.



Is modernism at crossroads with
cultural and civilizational ethos

Ayush a young boy of 5 had gone to his grandfather's house. His whole extended family had gathered there to celebrate the festival of Karva Chauth. He asked his mother a very peculiar question - who is the husband and wife between Shreuti and Vaibhavi? Now we see Shreuti was Ayush's aunt and Vaibhavi her lesbian partner. His Ayush's mother quipped that it doesn't matter and both can perform both roles.

In the above simple incident we see how modernity has intersected with our culture. The power of individuality the notion that an individual can develop their personality against social conformity is at the very heart of modernity. With the SC rulings in various cases like Nandey Johar, Naz foundation

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We have started moving towards greater acceptance of homosexuals. In Indian society we see that homosexuality is interlinking with our festivals thus blending modernity with cultural ethos.

In this essay we will try to explore this new proposition - "Is modernity at crossroads with our cultural and civilizational ethos". We

will see how modernism is both complementing and contradicting our civilizational ideas.

But first we need to understand what modernity is. How did it evolve? And what are its characteristics in the present age.

We see that medieval age was the age of religion. The authority of church was considered supreme. Church controlled all aspects of a person's life - from gender at birth to marriage to how the dead were treated.

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This system also perpetuated a system of elitism. There was no equality. It was considered some people are born to be masters and some slaves. It is our destiny to be born into certain families and we should conform.

However with various scientific discoveries like Copernicus told the earth revolves around sun. Galileo with his telescope exploded myths of perfectness of planets / heavenly bodies. People began to challenge assumptions previously held and it led to recognition of rationalism - the power of individual reason.

It led to the renaissance movement in west. This placed the individual at centre and questioned belief of church / religion determining everything. We see in works of philosophers like John Locke who recognized rights of

individual and told that in state of nature man has reason and thus lived peacefully with mutual assistance and goodwill with others.

Similarly J.S. Mill stated that freedom of speech and expression is the most important. Only humans have ability of speech and it is the essential human condition. He even recognized the subordination of women and that women should be allowed to participate in public affairs. Movement for women's rights were later started by liberal feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Emmeline Pankhurst etc.

Thus we see that modernity essentially evolved with belief in innate ability of humans. It recognized that all humans are equal and all are different. Everyone should have the opportunity to develop their personality. The ideals of democracy,

republic are closely linked to modernism

Having discussed how modernism evolved we need to see how it is at present and why it is at crossroads

A very prominent idea among this is by Samuel T Huntington who gave his thesis of clash of civilizations.

He countered the liberal thesis that end of cold war signified the victory of liberalism and liberalism and modern life would go unchallenged

Huntington said that with globalisation since we are interacting more there is a greater consciousness of our identity. Thus there is a possibility

of clash of identities / clash of civilizations

We see that his thesis coming ^{would} to life in many parts of life especially in Europe. European nations embraced immigration believing in ideals of human dignity. There was a vast

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inflow of migrants from Middle East, North Africa etc. However very soon there was a backlash from natives who feared that their cultures may get wiped off. This was exemplified by rise of nationalist right wing parties all over Europe. The latest riots ~~in~~ France where liberties etc are being burnt signify the challenges with immigration. It was earlier also expressed in killing of Samuel Paty. We see how modern values of France came into conflict with blasphemy which is a cultural thing associated mainly with Abrahamic faiths.

Elsewhere in America considered as the leader of free world and land of freedom we see a clash among wokenism and ultra conservatism. Modernity has been stretched to ~~the~~ ^{its} limits by progressives by essentially denying role of family in a child's life.

There is a rise of sex related surgeries and number of teens who identify as trans. Similarly the ultra conservatists clamour for reducing abortion rights denying a woman "choice" over her body.

If we refer to our local context we can see examples of how modernity is both contradicting and complementing our culture. With globalisation and inflow of FDI we see growth of cosmopolitan cities like Bangalore, Hyderabad. At the same time people are getting increasingly conscious of their identities. There is a rise of regional sentiments and assertion of linguistic, cultural traits from being morphed by the dominant majority.

With influence of westernism we also see greater recognition of our culture. The revival of yoga which now

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was a UN designated day signifies this. This year PM Modi himself led yoga day celebrations in New York. The benefits of yoga and meditation which has been ingrained in Indian culture are now reaching different parts of the globe.

Similarly with the revival of Toy industry via National Toy mission we see how ancient toys like Kinnal in Andhra, Kai Pradipi in Haryana are being revived and reaching children. There are also talks of how PUBG can be Indianized via an Indian battlefield story like Kurukshetra.

Old stereotypes of easternism are also being shattered with influence of westernism and modernism. There is greater inter-dining, social mobility.

Thus we see that modernism is indeed at crossroads with our cultural and civilizational ethos.

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Modernity can be both positive and negative. It is for us to take the positive aspects like emphasis on rationality to counter negative social traditions. However at the same time we should be conscious to not wipe off our essential cultural and civilizational ethos which have saved us well from time immemorial. As Gandhi himself said "I wish the cultures of all lands to be blown off my house as freely as possible but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any".