Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

A fresh engineering graduate gets a job in a prestigious chemical industry. She likes the work. The salary is also good. However, after a few months she accidentally discovers that a highly toxic waste is being secretly discharged into a river nearby. This is causing health problems to the villagers downstream who depend on the river for their water needs. She is perturbed and mentions her concern to her colleagues who have been with the company for longer periods. They advise her to keep quite as anyone who mentions the topic is summarily dismissed. She cannot risk losing her job as she is the sole bread-winner for her family and has to support her ailing parents and siblings. At first, she thinks that if her seniors are keeping quiet, why should she stick out her neck. But her conscience pricks her to do something to save the river and the people who depend upon it. At heart she feels that the advice of silence given by her friends is not correct though she cannot give reasons for it. She thinks you are a wise person and seeks your advice.

(a) What arguments can you advance to show her that keeping quiet is not morally right?

(b) What course of action would you advise her to adopt and why?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2016	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~250 words

Answer Hint

Environmental ethics; duty of care; public health; professional integrity; whistle-blowing; livelihood concerns; corporate accountability; evidence preservation; lawful reporting; moral courage

Model Answer

Introduction

The engineer faces a conflict between livelihood security and her moral responsibility to protect human health and the environment. Silence would allow preventable harm to continue.

(a) Why Silence Is Morally Wrong

- **Human welfare:** Villagers' health and access to safe water are being threatened.
- **Environmental responsibility:** Toxic discharge can cause lasting ecological damage.
- **Professional integrity:** Technical knowledge creates a responsibility to report serious safety violations.
- **Complicity through silence:** Concealment allows wrongdoing to continue and weakens accountability.
- **Justice:** Poor communities should not bear the health costs of corporate profit.

Her financial concerns are genuine, but they justify careful action rather than indefinite silence.

(b) Recommended Course of Action

1. **Verify and document:** Preserve lawful records of discharge, observations and relevant safety data without tampering with evidence.
2. **Use internal channels:** Report concerns to environmental, compliance or senior management authorities in writing, where safe.
3. **Escalate lawfully:** If the issue remains unresolved, approach the relevant pollution control authority or other competent regulator.
4. **Seek protection:** Obtain confidential legal advice and use available whistle-blower protections.
5. **Protect the community:** Support prompt assessment of water quality and mitigation of exposure through competent authorities.

Conclusion

I would advise a documented, lawful and graduated reporting strategy. It protects the public while managing personal risk and demonstrates that professional responsibility must extend beyond organisational loyalty.