

Indian Political Thought — Part II

Day 11. Five makers of modern Indian political thought — Sir Syed, Aurobindo, Gandhi, M. N. Roy and Ambedkar — compressed end to end for fast recall before the Mains. **Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.**

From this chapter's question record (UPSC 2016–2025): **4 × 10-markers · 6 × 15-markers · 2 × 20-markers**, spread across all five thinkers.

I The five thinkers — and how the paper reads them

Day 11 covers five makers of modern Indian political thought. Each answered the same colonial situation — a defeated polity, an alien modernity, an unequal society — but each placed a different value at the centre: **education** for Sir Syed, **spiritual nationhood** for Aurobindo, **moral self-rule** for Gandhi, **rational freedom** for Roy, **social democracy** for Ambedkar. Read them as one conversation about what makes India free.

Thinker	Signature ideas	Heat — dated PYQs
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–1898)	Aligarh reform; science with Islam; minority politics; loyalism after 1887	2021
Sri Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950)	spiritual & cultural nationalism; Purna Swaraj; passive resistance; human unity	2016 · 2017 · 2023
M. K. Gandhi (1869–1948)	Satya–Ahimsa–Satyagraha; ends = means; Swaraj; trusteeship; Sarvodaya	2016 · 2019 · 2025
M. N. Roy (1887–1954)	Marxism → Radical Humanism; Roy–Lenin colonial thesis; Radical Democracy	2024
B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956)	annihilation of caste; social democracy; state socialism; constitutional morality	2016 · 2017 · 2018 · 2020

Heat is a read of this chapter's own question record, not official UPSC weightage. Ambedkar, Gandhi and Aurobindo are the repeat-tested heavyweights; Roy and Sir Syed appear less often but have both surfaced recently.

2 Sir Syed Ahmed Khan — Aligarh, science and the minority question

Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was a leading reformer of nineteenth-century India: an educationist, Muslim modernist, religious rationalist and, in his early phase, a pluralist. Born into a family linked to the Mughal court, he watched the old Muslim elite lose authority after 1803 and lose it sharply after 1857.

After 1857 — three realisations

Serving as Sadr Amin in Bijnor during the Revolt, he protected British lives even as his own family suffered, and concluded that open confrontation was suicidal. **Peter Hardy** and **David Lelyveld** both read the post-1857 moment as the turning point: Muslims fell behind in English education and colonial service while other communities adapted faster. His answer was not rebellion but **education, science, rational Islam and cooperation with the British**.

- **Armed resistance had become suicidal** — British reprisals showed the cost of direct confrontation.
- **Education had become the key to power** — communities that took modern learning gained administration and influence; Muslims risked permanent disadvantage.
- **Muslim society needed a middle path** — between orthodox rejection of modernity and wholesale abandonment of tradition: modernise education, preserve Islamic identity.

Major works

Asar-us-Sanadeed (study of Delhi's monuments); **Asbab-i-Baghawat-i-Hind** (the causes of 1857 — the British did not understand Indian opinion and had shut Indians out of governance; the argument anticipated the inclusion of Indians under the Indian Councils Act of 1861); **The Loyal Mohammedans of India** (1860, against the charge that Muslims as a community were disloyal); **Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq** (1870, moral and social reform); **Khutbat-i-Ahmadiya** (a reasoned reply to William Muir's *Life of Muhammad*).

The Aligarh Movement — education and scientific temper

The Aligarh Movement was the first major reform awakening among Indian Muslims. Its principle: accept Western education without weakening Islamic allegiance. He founded the **Scientific Society** (1863, Ghazipur, later Aligarh) to translate Western knowledge into Urdu; launched the **Aligarh Institute Gazette** (1866); and after studying British institutions, founded the **Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College** (1875), which grew into Aligarh Muslim University.

George Farquhar Irving Graham praised the Society as a pioneering Muslim effort to bring Western knowledge to the masses; **Mohammad Hashim Kamali** stresses the place of scientific observation and rationality in his reading of the Qur'an — his reformism was rationalist, not anti-religious.

“Muslim youth should carry the book of science in one hand and the Holy Quran in the other hand.” — **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan**

Social reform and early pluralism

He criticised polygamy, the ban on widow remarriage and irrational custom, and supported women's education. His early politics were civic and inclusive: the MAO College had Hindu donors, teachers and students — in the early years Hindu students even outnumbered Muslims — and cow slaughter was banned on campus out of respect for Hindu feeling. **David Kopf** places his work within a wider current of social harmony across communities, and compares his role with **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**.

Hindus and Muslims were “the two beautiful eyes of a beautiful bride.” — **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan**

Two phases of his political thought

One reformer, two political phases — the hinge of 1887

First phase (to 1887)

secular · nationalist · pluralist — “by qaum I mean both Hindus and Muslims”; religion separate from politics; one soil, one ruler, shared benefit and hardship

worked with **Surendra Nath Banerjee** to restore the civil-services age limit



Second phase (after 1887)

communal · pro-British · anti-Congress — opposed representative government for India; preferred nomination and British safeguards

drew on **Theodore Beck**, principal of MAO College, for the loyalist turn

Why the shift after 1887

Several pressures combined: **demographic anxiety** (representative democracy read as Hindu-majority rule, with better-educated Bengali Hindus dominant); the **Urdu–Hindi controversy** over the Nagari script; **institutional dependence** of the MAO College on British goodwill; the influence of **Theodore Beck**; the rise of Hindu revivalism alongside Congress; and post-1857 pragmatism.

“Now I am convinced that these two nations will not work unitedly in any cause... on account of the so-called educated people, it will increase a hundred-fold in the future.” — **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, to Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk**

On democracy

He did not reject democracy as a moral idea; he rejected **Western representative democracy for India**. His reasoning: majority rule may suit a relatively homogeneous society, but a country divided by religion, caste, race and education would let the more numerous and better-educated community override the smaller one. His democratic thought was shaped by minority anxiety, not general anti-modernism — hence the tension between supporting education and consultation while opposing elections, agitation and representative government.

Criticism, legacy and contemporary relevance

His record is debated: the shift from common nationalism to separate Muslim interests, the opposition to representative government and a free press (he backed Lord Lytton’s press restrictions), the elite base of the Aligarh Movement, and the fact that many Muslims — **Badruddin Tyabji**, Congress Muslims, Deoband — took other paths. Yet his educational legacy is his strongest: a model of modern learning with Islamic grounding that produced a new intelligentsia. The *Sachar Committee Report* on Muslim educational backwardness, and the figure of roughly three per cent Muslim representation in the civil services discussed around it, keep his stress on education and his rational reading of Islam relevant against backwardness and extremism alike.

UPSC 2021 · 15m

“When a nation becomes devoid of arts and learning, it invites poverty.” In the light of this statement, assess the role of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan as a reformer in modern India.

3 Sri Aurobindo Ghosh — spiritual nationalism, Swaraj, human unity

Sri Aurobindo Ghosh stands apart in modern Indian thought: a revolutionary nationalist who became a seer. He never separated politics from spirituality — India’s freedom was both a political necessity and the condition for her larger spiritual role in the world.

Life and turning points

Born in Calcutta (1872) and sent to England at seven, he spent fourteen formative years there, studied at King’s College, Cambridge, and absorbed revolutionary ideas through Irish nationalists. Back in India (1893) he served Baroda and steeped himself in Vedanta and Bengali literature. The **Partition of Bengal (1905)** was the decisive turning point: he resigned, joined the extremist wing of Congress and the Swadeshi movement, and wrote in **Bande Mataram**, **Karmayogin** and *New Lamps for Old*. Acquitted in the Alipore Bomb Case (1908), he withdrew from active politics in 1910 to Pondicherry and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

Influences and the East–West synthesis

Indian: the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, Vedanta, the Neo-Vedanta of **Swami Vivekananda**, and **Bankim Chandra Chatterjee**’s image of India as Mother and Shakti. Western: **Johann Herder**, **Hegel**, **Karl Lamprecht** and the German idealist tradition, which he preferred to British utilitarianism, plus Irish methods.

“Sri Aurobindo was... the highest synthesis of the genius of Asia and the genius of Europe.” — **Romain Rolland**

Philosophically his politics rest on **Integral Yoga** (Purna Yoga) and a staged evolution of the collective self — symbolic, conventional, individualist and, highest, the **subjective** stage, where the individual realises the same divine force in all.

Critique of the Moderates and passive resistance

In *New Lamps for Old* he attacked the politics of petitions and prayers as politically weak and psychologically damaging — faulting Congress for limited aims, a narrow middle-class base, timid leadership and the failure to awaken the masses. His new politics rested on four methods: **Swaraj** **Swadeshi**

National Education

Boycott

His **passive resistance**, shaped by Irish methods, meant organised refusal of colonial authority — tax resistance, boycott of foreign goods, courts and government schools, and the building of national institutions. It anticipated later Gandhian non-cooperation, but unlike Gandhi he did *not* make non-violence an absolute rule: where repression turned brutal, force could not be wholly ruled out.

The nation as living Shakti

Against the colonial claim that India was a mere geographical expression, and the Moderate view that India was a nation in the making, Aurobindo held that India was *already* a nation with a living spirit — natural, immortal and capable of a divine mission.

“It is not a piece of earth... It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions that make up the nation.” — **Sri Aurobindo, in Bande Mataram**

Spiritual and cultural nationalism

Nationalism for him was not a programme but a faith, a religion to be lived, a divine mission. **Sanatana Dharma** — understood broadly, not sectarian — was the national personality, and cultural renaissance (in *The Renaissance in India* and *The Foundations of Indian Culture*) meant reviving India's civilisational selfhood while assimilating useful Western technique without self-negation. **Karan Singh** notes that his early writing “could be called spiritual nationalism... it revolved around the concept of India as the Mother.” Critically, national regeneration was a stage towards universal regeneration.

Swaraj as complete independence

He was among the earliest to define Swaraj as **Purna Swaraj** — complete independence, not administrative reform — and gave it two levels: **individual Swaraj** (inner freedom, self-realisation) and **national Swaraj** (recovery of national individuality).

“We of the new school would not pitch our ideal one inch lower than absolute Swaraj, self-government as it exists in the United Kingdom.” — **Sri Aurobindo, Bande Mataram, April 1907**

Swaraj was necessary because India had a destined spiritual role; foreign rule obstructed it.

Aurobindo's arc — freedom as a stage, not an end



Peter Heehs: freedom “was not an end in itself; it was the indispensable condition for India to guide the world if it re-awakened to its spiritual greatness.”

Later thought, criticism and assessment

After 1910 his thought moved to spiritual evolution and a final vision of **human unity** — not uniformity but complex oneness, nations preserved as cultural units within a wider whole. Critics argue his nationalism was religious in practice and could appear Hindu-centric, and that he offered little concrete socio-economic policy; he was charged with mysticism and anarchism, though he was no anarchist. His greatness lies in giving Indian nationalism spiritual depth, cultural confidence and a larger human purpose.

“Sri Aurobindo Ghosh is the poet of patriotism, the prophet of nationalism, and the saviour of humanity.” — **Chittaranjan Das**

UPSC 2016 · 20m Discuss Sri Aurobindo's views on Cultural Nationalism.

UPSC 2017 · 10m According to Sri Aurobindo, Swaraj is a necessary condition for India to accomplish its destined goal. Comment.

UPSC 2023 · 15m Sri Aurobindo's idea of Swaraj has deep significance in the Indian social, political and cultural history. Analyze.

4 M. K. Gandhi — truth, non-violence and the unity of ends and means

Mahatma Gandhi's political thought fuses moral philosophy, political action, social reform, economic reconstruction and civilisational critique. His architectonic ideas are **Ahimsa** and the **continuity of ends and means**; his politics sought not power but the moral regeneration of individual, society, economy and state.

Activist-theoretician

Joan V. Bondurant called him not a traditional theorist but a “political actionist and a practical philosopher” — he thought publicly and treated political action as moral experiment, which is why his writing carries apparent inconsistencies. Three book-length works anchor him: *An Autobiography (My Experiments with Truth)*, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, and **Hind Swaraj (1909)**, which links method (Satyagraha) to goal (Swaraj). **Dennis Dalton** notes his core beliefs formed before South Africa, which became the **laboratory** for Satyagraha.

Influences

Indian: the Bhagavad Gita, Jain and Hindu non-violence, Advaita, Tulsidas's *daya* as the essence of *dharma*, his political guru **Gopal Krishna Gokhale**, and **Aurobindo Ghosh's** idea of freedom as spiritual emancipation. Western: **John Ruskin** (*Unto This Last*), **Henry David Thoreau** (civil disobedience), **Leo Tolstoy** and the Sermon on the Mount, **Socrates** and **Plato** (he rendered the *Apology* into Gujarati), **Thomas Hill Green**. He also drew on an “Other West” — dissenting Western voices against empire and industrialism — a point developed by **Ashis Nandy**, **Vinay Lal** and **Aditya Nigam**.

Truth, Ahimsa, Satyagraha

Truth (Satya) is the foundation — not factual correctness but a moral and spiritual principle, a lifelong experiment; “God is truth.” **Ahimsa** is positive love, the weapon of the strong, not the avoidance of the weak; it inspired **Martin Luther King Jr.** and **Nelson Mandela**.

“Ahimsa is my creed/religion and article of faith.” — **Mahatma Gandhi**

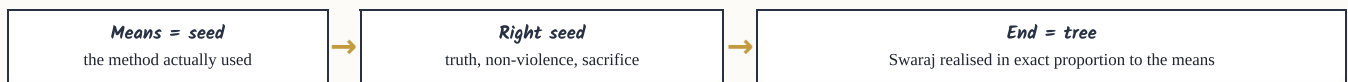
Satyagraha means truth-force or soul-force: resistance to injustice without hatred, struggle against evil and not the evil-doer, willingness to suffer rather than inflict suffering. It differs from passive resistance, which may be mere tactic and may harbour resentment; Satyagraha requires Ahimsa and obeys a higher moral law while accepting punishment for breaking an unjust one. **Bondurant** sets out its steps — negotiation, self-discipline, agitation, self-suffering, acceptance of consequences.

Ends and means — the moral core

Gandhi refused to separate ends from means: a noble end cannot be reached through immoral means, because the means shape the end.

“I would say ‘means are after all everything. As the means so the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits no exception.’” — Mahatma Gandhi

Why means decide the end — the seed and the tree



Hence “For me, Ahimsa comes before Swaraj. Even if the end is right, if the means are wrong, that will vitiate the end” — and hence the withdrawal of Non-Cooperation after **Chauri Chaura**. Set against others, his position is distinctive:

Position	View of means
Niccolo Machiavelli · Kautilya	politics may be separated from ethics; deception and force serve the state’s survival
Engels · Lenin	flexible means for revolutionary ends; historical transformation comes first
Leon Trotsky	no means accepted automatically; means must serve human liberation
Gandhi	immoral means refused under all circumstances; politics is ethically guided action

UPSC 2016 · ISm Examine Gandhi’s critique of ‘Modernisation’.

5 Gandhi continued — civilisation, the state, Swaraj and the village

The second half of Gandhi’s thought turns from method to vision: a critique of modern civilisation, a moral case against the centralised state, and a positive programme of self-rule rooted in the village.

The critique of modern civilisation

In **Hind Swaraj (1909)** Gandhi condemned modern Western civilisation as **Satanic** — built on greed, speed, endless wants, bodily comfort and violence, and emptied of spirituality and self-restraint. He did not reject machines outright; he rejected their worship.

“What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such... The supreme consideration is man.” — Mahatma Gandhi

The objection was moral, not technophobic: industrialism concentrates wealth, uproots the village and reduces persons to instruments. **Joseph Cornelius Kumarappa** put the ecological cost sharply — “There can be no industrialization without predation” — and Gandhi held that colonial education had completed the conquest: “The foundation that **Macaulay** laid of education has enslaved us.”

The state, violence and the individual

Gandhi’s suspicion of the modern state is the root of the 2025 question. The state, for him, is organised coercion; it has no soul, and so cannot be reformed out of the violence on which it stands.

“The State represents violence in a concentrated and organised form. The individual has a soul, but as the State is a soulless machine, it can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence.” — Mahatma Gandhi

From this follows his fear of an ever-larger state — the line UPSC lifted in 2025:

“I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear because, although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality.” — Mahatma Gandhi

For Gandhi the **individual is the one supreme consideration**; he rejected the Austinian idea of an unlimited sovereign and made the person, not the state, the seat of conscience. Yet his individualism is moral, not selfish — “Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle. We have learned to strike the mean between individual freedom and social restraint.”

Civil disobedience and the true constitutionalist

Because conscience outranks unjust law, the **Satyagrahi** is the real constitutionalist: she obeys the moral law, breaks the unjust statute openly, and accepts the penalty. Gandhi drew the lineage from **Henry David Thoreau, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, Socrates** and the figure of **Antigone** — conscience set against the unjust command of the state. His constitutionalism is later mirrored in the duty to participate (Article 51-A), village self-government (Article 40, the 73rd and 74th Amendments) and the ethic of non-violent dissent.

Swaraj — rule over the self

Swaraj is the heart of Gandhi’s politics, and the 2019 question. It is far more than the transfer of power: he refused “English rule without the Englishman.” **Dennis Dalton** reads it across three levels — national independence, political freedom of the individual, and the inner spiritual freedom of self-rule.

“Real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.” — Mahatma Gandhi

Hence “It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves,” and Swaraj “for the meanest of my countrymen.” Its pillars were **Hindu-Muslim unity, the abolition of untouchability and village upliftment**; its political ideal was **Ramrajya** — not a theocracy but a moral order of justice, people’s sovereignty and care for the poorest, pictured through “oceanic circles” of self-governing villages rather than a pyramid of power.

Gram Swaraj and the moral economy

Swaraj had to begin in the village, against the drift to the city.

“I regard the growth of cities as an evil thing... The blood of the villages is the cement with which the edifice of the cities is built.” — Mahatma Gandhi

“Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers...” — Mahatma Gandhi

The economics that supports this is moral economics: **Swadeshi** (devotion to the local), **khadi** and decentralised work, **bread labour**, and **aparigraha** (non-possession). His slogan inverted the factory ideal — “production by the masses” rather than mass production.

Trusteeship and Sarvodaya

Trusteeship is Gandhi’s alternative to both capitalism and violent communism: the wealthy hold surplus wealth in trust for society.

“What is needed is not the extinction of landlords and capitalists, but a transformation of the existing relationship between them and the masses into something healthier and purer.” — Mahatma Gandhi

Gunnar Myrdal attacked it as “a concept that fits into a paternalistic, feudal, pre-democratic society... so flexible that it can serve as a justification for inequality.” Its faint institutional echo is the statutory CSR mandate under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013. **Sarvodaya** — “welfare of all” — began as the title of his 1908 rendering of **John Ruskin’s** *Unto This Last*, was extended to **Antyodaya** (the last person first), and was carried forward by **Vinoba Bhave** through Bhoodan after Gandhi’s assassination in 1948, and later by **Jayaprakash Narayan’s** Total Revolution.

Gandhi and Marx — the standard contrast

Theme	Karl Marx	Mahatma Gandhi
Basis	materialism	spiritual and moral philosophy
Class	haves vs have-nots based on property	mental outlook that treats some work as inferior
Method	class struggle and revolution	class cooperation and Satyagraha
Property	social ownership of means of production	trusteeship
State	instrument of class domination	soulless machine and coercive institution
Technology	development of productive forces	human labour and village machinery
Religion	“opium of the people”	moralising force
Future society	“from each according to his ability, to each according to his need”	self-disciplined persons with minimum needs performing duties

Caste, criticism and reach

On caste Gandhi moved in stages, but in his early defence held the four-fold order workable while condemning untouchability: “The division... into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine... The four divisions are all-sufficing.” **B. R. Ambedkar** rejected this root and branch — varna itself, not merely its excess, was the disease. **Rabindranath Tagore** faulted the cult of the spinning wheel and the narrowing of reason; **Myrdal** read trusteeship as feudal. Yet Gandhi’s synthesis of ethics and politics gave the freedom struggle its mass form and inspired **Martin Luther King Jr.** and **Nelson Mandela**.

UPSC 2019 · 10m Comment on M. K. Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj in 150 words.

UPSC 2025 · 15m “State... does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress.” — Mahatma Gandhi.

Elucidate.

6 M. N. Roy — from Marxism to Radical Humanism

M. N. Roy (1887–1954), born Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, is modern India’s most striking ideological traveller: revolutionary nationalist, founding international communist, and finally a radical humanist who placed the free individual above class, nation, party and state.

Roy’s four phases — one search for freedom



Mexico, the Comintern and the colonial thesis

Mexico (1917) was the turning point: Roy helped found the Mexican Communist Party and was drawn into the **Communist International**. At its Second Congress (1920) he clashed with **Lenin** over the National and Colonial Questions. **Bipan Chandra** notes that Roy, “along with Lenin, helped evolve the Communist International’s policy towards the colonies.”

The Roy–Lenin difference on colonial revolution

Lenin

communists in colonies should ally with the bourgeois-nationalist movement as a first stage against imperialism



Roy

build independent communist and worker-peasant organisations; the bourgeois leadership cannot be trusted

Roy made the colonies central to world revolution

colonial revolt → collapse of empire → weakening of European capitalism → socialism in the West

His *India in Transition* (1922) applied Marxism to Indian conditions. Even here Roy read **Marx** morally: “Capital is a treatise on social ethics — a powerful protest against the servitude of the toiling majority.”

The humanist critique of Marxism

Expelled from the Comintern (1929) and disillusioned by **Stalin**’s suppression of dissent, Roy turned critic. He rejected the sufficiency of economic change — “The abolition of private property, state ownership of the means of production and planned economy do not by themselves end exploitation of labour nor lead to an equal distribution of wealth” — and attacked the **fallacy of economic determinism**, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the reduction of the person to a class. Communism in practice, he warned, “has come to be a spectre, terrifying not only the bourgeoisie; it is causing grave misgivings even among the progressive forces of the modern world.”

Radical Humanism — the individual first

In *New Humanism — A Manifesto* (1947) Roy made freedom the first value and the individual prior to society.

“Freedom is the supreme value of life, because the urge for freedom is the essence of human existence.” — **M. N. Roy**

It rests on three supports — **reason** **morality** **scientific materialism** — with ethics drawn from the “rational desire for harmonious and mutually beneficial social relations.” **Sudipta Kaviraj** sees beneath the communist and humanist phrases “a substratum of philosophic continuity”; Roy’s mature test of any social order was “the actual measure of freedom it gives to the individual.”

Radical Democracy and the Indian polity

Politically this became **Radical Democracy** — a party-less, organised democracy of local **people’s committees**, with maximum power at the base and minimum at the apex, achieved by “revolution by consent and education,” not by seizure. The blueprint was his “22 Theses” / Principles of Radical Democracy (1946). Watching independent India, he warned that concentrated power hollows out form:

“When political power is concentrated in the hands of a small community, you may have a facade of parliamentary democracy, but for all political purposes it will be a dictatorship, even if it may be paternal and benevolent.” — **M. N. Roy**

He read **Gandhi** as a religious revivalist and rejected trusteeship and the spinning-wheel cult, calling the Congress High Command “authoritarian.” **Kaviraj** later called Roy a “remarkable failure” — not for poverty of thought, but because Indian politics never embraced the rationalist, ethical individualism he urged. That is also why he matters: a serious Indian attempt to ground politics in freedom and reason rather than class, faith or nation.

UPSC 2024 · 15m Manabendra Nath Roy’s political thought highlighted the humanistic aspects of Marxism. Discuss.

7 B. R. Ambedkar — caste, religion and social justice

B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) was jurist, economist, social reformer and constitutionalist, and the architect of social justice in the Indian Constitution. His lifelong aim was a society of **liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity** and “one man, one value.”

Life and works

Born into a Mahar family and scarred by untouchability, he took an M.A. and Ph.D. from Columbia University and a D.Sc. from the London School of Economics. He launched **Mooknayak** (1920), led the **Mahad Satyagraha** (1927) for water rights and the burning of the Manusmriti, secured separate-electorate concessions reshaped by the **Poona Pact** (1932), chaired the **Drafting Committee**, served as independent India’s first Law Minister, resigned in 1951 over the Hindu Code Bill, and embraced **Buddhism** in 1956. His key texts are *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) and *States and Minorities* (1947).

Influences

Liberal and radical: the **French Revolution**, his Columbia teacher **John Dewey** (pragmatism), and **John Stuart Mill**; he accepted constitutional democracy but rejected a liberalism blind to social and economic inequality. Moral and spiritual: **Buddhism**, read as a religion of **Karuna** (compassion), **Samata** (equality) and **Prajna** (reason against superstition).

The analysis of caste

Accepting **S. V. Ketkar**’s stress on **endogamy** as the mechanism that seals caste, Ambedkar gave it deeper force: caste is not a division of labour but a hierarchy of labourers.

“Caste is not just a division of labor, it is a division of laborers.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

Its essence is **graded inequality** — an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt — sustained by endogamy, purity–pollution and the religious sanction of the Vedas, Shastras and Manusmriti. The Untouchables, he argued, were the “broken men” who lived on the village outskirts.

Annihilation of caste

His undelivered 1936 address demanded that **social reform precede political reform**: political democracy resting on a caste society would not hold. Caste, he wrote, corrodes the moral life itself.

“Virtue had become caste-ridden, and morality caste-bound.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

The cure was not reform of rules but their destruction: reject the scriptural sanction behind caste, replace a “religion of rules” with a “religion of principles,” and use inter-caste marriage for the “fusion of blood.” **Madhu Limaye** compared the tract’s force to the *Communist Manifesto*.

The critique of Hinduism

Ambedkar’s critique was rational-humanist: a religion is to be judged by its morality.

“Hinduism is a religion, which is not founded on morality... The religion of Buddha has morality. It is embedded in religion... In place of God, there is morality.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

Buddhism, by contrast, made morality the core — a social, rational and emancipatory faith, not a private ritual order, and an alternative to Brahmanism.

Social justice

Social justice for Ambedkar means applying **distributive justice** to society’s wealth, privileges and opportunities, and is “another name for liberty, equality and fraternity.” The argument anticipates **John Rawls** on equality of opportunity and care for the least advantaged, and echoes **Harold Laski**: “without equality there cannot be liberty... and that liberty is worthless without economic security and access to knowledge.” He built this into the Constitution — equality and the abolition of untouchability (Articles 14–17), the ban on forced labour (Article 23), the directive goals of justice (Article 38), and safeguards for the disadvantaged (Articles 330–342) backed by enforceable remedies (Articles 32 and 226). **Granville Austin** called the document “first and foremost a social document”; **Vivek Kumar** and **Valerian Rodrigues** read his project as democracy — political, economic and social — secured by constitutional means and a “massive intervention by the state in favour of the disadvantaged.”

UPSC 2018 · 15m Discuss Ambedkar’s ideas on ‘annihilation of caste’.

8 Ambedkar continued — democracy, state socialism, constitutional morality

The political half of **Ambedkar**’s thought turns social justice into institutions: a democracy that reaches social life, a constitutional state socialism, and a constitutional morality that must be learned.

Social democracy

Drawing on **John Dewey**, Ambedkar held that democracy is not merely a constitutional form.

“Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards our fellow men.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

Political democracy — one person, one vote — cannot survive on a base of social and economic inequality. On 26 January 1950 he warned that India was entering “a life of contradictions”: political equality alongside social and economic inequality. The danger is that one ideal devours another.

“Democracy is another name of equality... Liberty swallowed equality, making democracy a name and farce.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

UPSC 2017 · 20m Political democracy could not last unless social democracy lay at its base – B. R. Ambedkar. Comment.

State socialism by constitution

In *States and Minorities* Ambedkar proposed a **constitutional state socialism**: state ownership of key industry and agriculture, written into the constitution itself so that it could not be undone by shifting legislative majorities.

“It establishes State Socialism by the law of constitution and thus makes it unalterable by any act of the legislature and the executive.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

Unlike **Marx**, he sought this “without bloodshed,” within a liberal-democratic frame close to the **Fabian** tradition — warning that if parliamentary democracy failed to deliver social and economic objectives, the outcome would be “rebellion, anarchy and communism.”

UPSC 2016 · 10m Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s idea of state socialism.

Constitutional morality

Institutions, Ambedkar insisted, run on a spirit that must be cultivated, drawing the idea from **George Grote** and the British tradition associated with **Walter Bagehot**.

“Constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

He cautioned that democracy in India was only a “top-dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic,” demanded constitutional methods over the “Grammar of Anarchy,” and cast the Supreme Court as the “sentinel on the qui vive.” The idea has had a long judicial afterlife: *Kesavananda Bharati* (1973) and the Basic Structure doctrine; *S. P. Gupta* (1981) on constitutional conventions; and a 2018 trio — *Government of NCT of Delhi*, *Navtej Singh Johar* and *Joseph Shine* — placing constitutional morality above popular morality to protect individual rights and autonomy.

UPSC 2020 · 10m Comment on Ambedkar’s view on constitutionalism in 150 words.

Gandhi and Ambedkar — the great debate

Two reformers, two routes to the same dignity

Gandhi

reform varna from within; “Harijan”; village as moral republic; trusteeship; change of heart



Ambedkar

annihilate caste at the root; “Dalit” self-assertion; village a “den of ignorance”; state and law; constitutional rights

Arundhati Roy, in *The Doctor and the Saint*, frames the clash over varna and caste

Rajmohan Gandhi argues Gandhi later moved towards “Caste Has to Go”

Nationalism and assessment

Ambedkar read nationhood as a subjective feeling of kinship — a “consciousness of kind” — and insisted that without social democracy India remained “a group of warring camps.” **Arun Shourie** charged him with weak nationalism; **Christophe Jaffrelot** answered that his project built a broader, Bahujan basis for democracy. **Dhananjay Keer**’s biography fixes his stature: the figure who made social justice the test of Indian democracy and gave the oppressed a constitutional language of dignity.

9 Revision back matter

Quotes worth carrying into the hall

“Muslim youth should carry the book of science in one hand and the Holy Quran in the other hand.” — **Sir Syed Ahmed Khan**

“It is not a piece of earth... It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions that make up the nation.” — **Sri Aurobindo**

“I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear... it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality.” — **Mahatma Gandhi**

“Real swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused.” — **Mahatma Gandhi**

“Freedom is the supreme value of life, because the urge for freedom is the essence of human existence.” — **M. N. Roy**

“Caste is not just a division of labor, it is a division of laborers.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

“Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” — **B. R. Ambedkar**

How UPSC has asked this chapter (2016–2025)

Thinker	Year · Marks	Focus of the question
Sir Syed Ahmed Khan	2021 · 15m	arts and learning; role as a reformer in modern India
Sri Aurobindo Ghosh	2016 · 20m	views on cultural nationalism
Sri Aurobindo Ghosh	2017 · 10m	Swaraj as condition for India’s destined goal
Sri Aurobindo Ghosh	2023 · 15m	significance of his idea of Swaraj
M. K. Gandhi	2016 · 15m	critique of modernisation
M. K. Gandhi	2019 · 10m	concept of Swaraj
M. K. Gandhi	2025 · 15m	state destroys individuality
M. N. Roy	2024 · 15m	humanistic aspects of Marxism
B. R. Ambedkar	2016 · 10m	idea of state socialism
B. R. Ambedkar	2017 · 20m	social democracy as the base of political democracy
B. R. Ambedkar	2018 · 15m	annihilation of caste
B. R. Ambedkar	2020 · 10m	view on constitutionalism

A heat-read of this chapter’s own question record, not official UPSC weightage. Treat the spread — Ambedkar four times, Gandhi and Aurobindo three each — as a guide to depth, not a forecast.

Today’s practice — write one, fully

2023 · 15m Sri Aurobindo’s idea of Swaraj has deep significance in the Indian social, political and cultural history. Analyze.

2024 · 15m Manabendra Nath Roy’s political thought highlighted the humanistic aspects of Marxism. Discuss.

2025 · 15m “State... does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality, which lies at the root of all progress.” — Mahatma Gandhi. Elucidate.

Scholar and commentator index

Aditya Nigam · Antigone · Arun Shourie · Arundhati Roy · Ashis Nandy · Badruddin Tyabji · Bankim Chandra Chatterjee · Bipan Chandra · Chittaranjan Das · Christophe Jaffrelot · David Kopf · David Lelyveld · Dennis Dalton · Dhananjay Keer · Engels · George Farquhar Irving Graham · George Grote · Gopal Krishna Gokhale · Granville Austin · Gunnar Myrdal · Harold Laski · Hegel · Henry David Thoreau · Jayaprakash Narayan · Joan V. Bondurant · Johann Herder · John Dewey · John Locke · John Rawls · John Ruskin · John Stuart Mill · Joseph Cornelius Kumarappa · Karan Singh · Karl Lamprecht · Karl Marx · Kautilya · Lenin · Leo Tolstoy · Leon Trotsky · Madhu Limaye · Martin Luther King Jr. · Mohammad Hashim Kamali · Nelson Mandela · Niccolo Machiavelli · Peter Hardy · Peter Heehs · Plato · Rabindranath Tagore · Raja Ram Mohan Roy · Rajmohan Gandhi · Romain Rolland · S. V. Ketkar · Socrates · Sudipta Kaviraj · Surendra Nath Banerjee · Swami Vivekananda · Theodore Beck · Thomas Babington Macaulay · Thomas Hill Green · Thomas Jefferson · Valerian Rodrigues · Vinay Lal · Vinoba Bhave · Vivek Kumar · Walter Bagehot

Cue for the desk. Hold the five together as one argument about Indian freedom: Sir Syed makes it a question of *education*, Aurobindo of *spirit*, Gandhi of *moral self-rule*, Roy of *reason*, Ambedkar of *social equality*. In the hall, anchor every thinker to one verbatim line and one comparison — Gandhi against Marx, Ambedkar against Gandhi, Roy against Lenin — and a 15-marker writes itself.

See you tomorrow with Day 12 — Western Political Thought (Part 1): Plato, Aristotle and Machiavelli.