

PSIR OPTIONAL · UPSC CSE

EDITION 2026

PYQ Vault

560

questions

50

days

10

years of PYQs

DAY 26

Social Movements · 8 questions

Every question carries a *Flow Snapshot* — and a handwritten model answer on the channel. No PYQ will be unfamiliar.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2016 · 15 marks

Critically examine the provisions made in the Constitution for the protection of Environment.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

- R1** Constitution offers no single environmental provision → protects through an enabling spread of duties, directives and rights → deepened by the courts.
- R2** Environmental protection sits in the Constitution as an enabling framework → Directive Principles + Fundamental Duty + judicially expanded Article 21 → both strength and limits flow from this.

Body
flow

Directive Principles set the state's duty (Art 48-A environment/forests/wildlife; Art 47 public health; Art 48 agriculture-sustainability) → Fundamental Duty Art 51-A(g) makes the citizen responsible → enforceable core Article 21 → Supreme Court reads in a right to a healthy, pollution-free environment → *Dehradun Quarrying* + *M. C. Mehta* strengthen the environmental meaning of life and liberty → PIL via Articles 32 & 226 → statutory backing (Environment Protection Act, Forest Conservation Act).

Counter-
view

Provisions enabling, not self-executing → Directive Principles + citizen duty non-justiciable → force depends on judicial activism → central limitation is implementation (disasters, dilution of norms, weak enforcement) → promise stays ahead of practice.

Conclusion
routes

- R1** Framework enabling by design → limited by non-enforceable directives and the enforcement gap → promise runs ahead of practice.
- R2** Article 21 jurisprudence gives the framework real teeth → but constitutional protection is only as strong as its enforcement.

The Constitution works as an enabling document for environmental protection. It does this not through one dedicated provision but through a spread of duties, directives and rights that the courts have deepened.

The DPSPs set the state's obligation. Article 48-A directs the state to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard forests and wildlife. Article 47 connects public health with environmental protection and Article 48 links scientific agriculture and animal husbandry to sustainability. Article 51-A (g) makes protecting forests, lakes, rivers & wildlife a fundamental duty of every citizen, treating environmental commons as a shared responsibility.

The enforceable core comes from Article 21. The Supreme Court has read into the right to life a right to a healthy, pollution-free environment.

The Dehradun Quarrying case and M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India strengthened the environmental meaning of life and liberty, where PIL under Articles 32 and 226 opened the courts to environmental litigation. Statutes such as the Environment Protection Act and Forest conservation act supply legislative backing.

The provisions, however, remain largely enabling rather than self-executing. The DPSPs and FDs are not directly enforceable, the framework depends on judicial activism for its force.

Its central limitation is implementation i.e. disasters, dilution of norms and weak enforcement. Keep the constitutional promise ahead of everyday practice.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2018 · 15 marks

Critically analyse the environmentalist movement in Tuticorin, Tamil Nadu.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

- R1** Locate the movement → grassroots environmental-justice struggle against Sterlite Copper (Vedanta), Thoothukudi → resistance since the 1990s, peaked 2018 → demand = closure over pollution and health.
- R2** Frame as a poor-community struggle defending livelihood and health against a polluting plant the state had cleared where others refused.

Body
flow

Grievance documented — **NEERI** report 2011 (copper, lead, cadmium, fluoride in groundwater) + 2013 gas leak → **CSE**: three states rejected the plant first + faulty EIA → state cleared what others refused (governance failure) → popular base: fisher folk, Dalits, small farmers, women, church groups, students; women as moral voices → social media mobilised 100,000+, challenged official narratives → TNPCB clearance rejected but construction continued → police firing, eleven dead → environmental justice tied to democratic rights → **Sahu**: reinforcing Swaraj and democracy.

Counter-
view

Narain's fire-fighting critique → closure achieved, development model left untouched → weak environmental governance persists.

Conclusion
routes

- R1** A real victory for environmental justice and an exposure of governance failure, but bounded by an unchanged development model.
- R2** Success and limit are the same fact → one plant closed, the paradigm that breeds such conflicts intact.

The Tuticorin movement was a grassroots environmental justice struggle against the Sterlite Copper plant of Vedanta in Thoothukudi. Resistance existed since the 1990s but gained sharp visibility in 2018.

A National Environmental Engineering Research Institute report (2011) found high levels of copper, lead, cadmium and fluoride in groundwater, and a 2013 gas leak deepened public distrust.

The movement drew its strength from fisher folk, Dalits, small farmers, women, church groups and students with women from fishing and Dalit backgrounds as its moral voices. Social media mobilised over 100,000 participants and challenged official narratives.

The movement drew its strength from fisher folk, Dalits, small farmers, women, church groups and students, with women from fishing and Dalit backgrounds as its moral voices. Social media mobilised over 100,000 participants and challenged official narratives.

The state's response exposed the link between environmental justice and democratic rights. Though the Tamil Nadu pollution control board had rejected clearance, construction continued; the agitation ended in police firing that killed eleven. S. N. Sahu view this as the movement reinforcing Swaraj & democracy.

However, Sumita Narain argues, such movements adopt a fire-fighting approach i.e. they close a single plant but leave the development model untouched.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2019 · 10 marks

Write short note on the significance of Chipko Movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

R1 1973 Garhwal, tree-hugging against commercial felling → significance = ecology tied to livelihood ("Ecology is economy").

R2 Open on its layered character → not a single-issue protest → environmental + peasant + women's + regional at once.

Body
flow

Layered character → women at the core → early ecofeminism (forest loss raises women's fuel/fodder/water burden) → the poor suffer most from degradation → **Guha's** "environmentalism of the poor" (survival, not leisure) → **Shiva & Bandyopadhyay**: a revival of "forest satyagraha" → concrete impact: 15-year felling ban + National Forest Policy, 1988 + inspired Appiko and Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Counter-
view

Guha's later assessment → forests, rivers and water tables kept declining after Chipko → structural change limited, dominant development model largely intact.

Conclusion
routes

R1 Lasting worth = binding ecology to survival + a Gandhian, non-violent template.

R2 Impact lies more in awareness and precedent than in transforming the development model.

The Chipko Movement began in 1973 in the Garhwal region, where villagers hugged trees to stop commercial felling. Its significance lies in linking ecology with livelihood, captured in the slogan "Ecology is economy".

Chipko was an environmental movement against deforestation, a peasant struggle for forest resources, a women's assertion, and a regional revolt against plains domination. Women's central role made it an early ecofeminist movement because forest loss directly raised their burden of gathering fuel, fodder and water.

Ramachandra Guha calls "Environmentalism of the poor" i.e. protest driven by survival, not leisure. Vandana Shiva and Jayanta Bandyopadhyay calls its method as a revival of "forest satyagraha".

Its influence was concrete : a 15 year ban on commercial green felling, ecological sensitivity in the National Forest Policy, 1988 and inspiration for Appiko and the Narmada Bachao Andolan.

Guha argues that forests and rivers kept declining even after Chipko. Its significance lies less in changing the development model than in binding ecology to survival through a Gandhian non-violent method.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2020 · 15 marks

Examine the nature of the civil liberty movement in India.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

- R1** Civil liberty movement defends individual freedom, equality before law and rule of law against an arbitrary state → read its nature through origin, method and limits.
- R2** Open from colonial roots → demands born of press curbs, racial discrimination, detention → a state-facing struggle from the start.

Body
flow

Colonial resistance (press restrictions, racial discrimination in courts, Rowlatt Act, detention without trial) → **Nilanjan Dutta**, 19th-century demands → freedom struggle as a mass civil liberties movement → **Ambedkar** links liberty to anti-caste struggle + minority protection → post-independence lull → Naxalite repression + Emergency 1975 revive it → **Jayaprakash Narayan** → PUCL & DR, 1976 → split: liberal court-oriented wing / Marxist grassroots wing → dual character → methods (courts, PIL under **Bhagwati**, fact-finding, constitutional language, protest) → widening concerns (speech, detention, prison reform, tribal rights, displacement, privacy, information).

Counter-
view

Nandita Haksar → movement bounded by nationalist discourse → zero tolerance towards terrorism becomes zero tolerance towards activism.

Conclusion
routes

- R1** That tension defines its nature → remains relevant amid surveillance, preventive detention and sedition-type laws.
- R2** Not one moment but a continuing struggle → plural in method and concern, state-facing throughout.

Civil liberty movements in India defend individual freedom, equality before law and the rule of law against arbitrary state power. Their nature is viewed through their origin, their methods and their limits, rather than through any single moment.

Nilanjan Dutta traces such demands to the 19th century, when educated Indians sought equality of opportunity & freedom of the press. The freedom struggle was itself a mass civil liberties movement. B.R. Ambedkar tied liberty to the anti-caste struggle and to the protection of minorities.

Jayaprakash Narayan inspired the People's Union for Civil Liberties and democratic rights in 1976. It later split into a liberal, court oriented wing and a Marxist, grassroots wing, which shows the movement's dual character.

Its methods run from courts, PIL under Justice PN Bhagwati, fact finding and constitutional language to open protest. Its concerns widened to speech, detention, prison reform, tribal rights, displacement, privacy and information.

Nandita Haksar argues that the movement works within the limits of nationalist discourse: zero tolerance towards terrorism often becomes zero tolerance towards activism. That tension defines its nature and keeps it relevant amid surveillance, preventive detention and sedition-type laws.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 10 marks

Comment on Environmentalism of the poor.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

- R1** Concept = ecological struggle of poor and marginal communities → livelihood, health, culture, autonomy at stake → survival, not leisure.
- R2** Not a post-material luxury → for the poor, protecting forests/land/water is a survival struggle → ties human and ecological survival together.

Body flow

Martinez-Alier: ecological distribution conflicts (who bears costs / who gains) → **Guha:** Northern “full stomach” (scientists) vs Southern “empty stomach” (the poor) → joins distribution + recognition + participation; human rights = environmental rights → arises around mining, dams, land grabbing, biomass; idiom of dignity and sacredness → Indian cases: Chipko (**Guha's** label), Narmada, Niyamgiri, Tuticorin → Forest Rights Act, 2006 as a legal response.

Counter-view

The poor are not always environmentalists → the concept names only conflicts where survival aligns with ecological preservation.

Conclusion routes

- R1** Reframes environmentalism as justice — the distribution of ecological benefits and burdens.
- R2** Ecological protection and human survival are inseparable → environment as equity, not leisure.

Environmentalism of the poor names the ecological struggles of poor and marginal communities against state or private projects that threaten their livelihood, health, culture and autonomy. For them defending forests, land and water is a matter of daily survival, not leisure.

Joan Martinez-Alier links the idea to ecological distribution conflicts, disputes over who bears environmental costs and who reaps the benefits. Ramachandra Guha calls this by distinguishing a Northern "full stomach" environmentalism, led by scientists, from a Southern "empty stomach" environmentalism, led by poor.

It usually arises around mining, dams, land grabbing & biomass extraction and speaks the language of dignity and sacredness rather than pure conservation.

Indian instances include Chipko, which Guha called environmentalism of the poor, along with Narmada Bachao Andolan, Niyangiri and Tuticorin. The Forest Rights Act, 2006 is one legal response.

It does not claim the poor are always environmentalists; it identifies conflicts where survival aligns with ecological preservation, making environmentalism a question of justice.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2023 · 15 marks

Dr. Ambedkar's clarion call, "Educate, Agitate and Organize", strategizes the Dalit movement towards achieving civil liberty. Discuss.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

- R1** Ambedkar recast Dalit politics as a struggle for civil liberty → the Nagpur 1942 call = the method.
- R2** The three-word call = one connected strategy → each step prepares the next.

Body
flow

Educate = a conscious claimant (self-respect, knowledge of rights, rejection of caste fatalism; People's Education Society + journals) → Agitate = press the claim (Mahad, Kalaram; liberty is claimed, not gifted) → Organize = scattered humiliation into collective force (Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, Samaj Samta Sang, SC Federation; **Jaffrelot** — Bahujans, pan-India) → constitutional entrenchment (untouchability abolished, equality, reservations, minority protection).

Counter-
view

Mobilisation alone cannot secure liberty → democracy does not guarantee minority rights → the strategy needed a legal-constitutional safeguard, not protest alone.

Conclusion
routes

- R1** Civil liberty is secured only when consciousness + protest + organisation + law act together.
- R2** The triad as one integrated emancipatory method, completed in the Constitution.

Ambedkar turned Dalit politics from a plea for sympathy into an organised struggle for civil liberty, social justice & constitutional democracy. His call at the All India Depressed Classes conference in Nagpur in 1942, "Educate, Agitate and Organize", sets the method.

Education came first because liberty needs a conscious claimant. Through the People's Education Society and journals such as Mooknayak, Bahishkrit Bharat, Samata and Janta, Ambedkar awakened Dalits who no longer accepted humiliation as fate.

Agitation was peaceful mobilisation against caste oppression: the Mahad Satyagraha for water at Chavdar Tank & the Kaluam Temple Entry Satyagraha at Nashik. For Ambedkar, dignity & liberty are never gifts from the oppressor; they are claimed through struggle.

Organisation gave the claim staying power, turning scattered humiliation into collective force through the Bahishkrit Hitakari Sabha, the Samaj Santa Sang and the SC Federation. According to Christophe Jaffrelot, Ambedkar lifted the Bahujans through collective action at a pan-India level.

Ambedkar knew democracy alone does not secure minority rights. He therefore built these freedoms into the constitution: abolition of untouchability, equality, reservations and minority protections.

The triad achieved civil liberty because consciousness, protest, organisation and legal safeguard worked together.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 10 marks

Comment on Women's role in anti-arrack movement.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

- R1** Locate: AP, early 1990s, a rural women's uprising → born in Dubagunta, Nellore from the National Literacy Campaign → women name arrack → women as central actors, private grievance → public struggle.
- R2** Open on agency: unlettered rural women, no political experience → move household suffering into political action → force the state to act → the "comment" weighs the significance of that leadership.

Body
flow

Literacy-campaign origin → women link alcohol to domestic violence / financial ruin / social breakdown → forms of action (marches, picketing, night patrols, sit-ins, processions, brewing material destroyed, fines) → opponents: liquor contractors + the state's Varun Vahini → feminist reading: **Tharu & Lalitha** (patriarchy at home + in public) → **Mazumdar** (rural women changing policy = a turning point) → 'the personal is the political'.

Counter-
view

Weigh the mismatch: inexperienced, unlettered rural women vs powerful liquor contractors + the state's own Varun Vahini patronage → that ordinary women overturned this nexus is what makes their role significant.

Conclusion
routes

- R1** Outcome: CM **Kotla Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy** bans arrack, 1 Oct 1993 → women without formal power reshaped state policy.
- R2** Close on scale: one of the largest women-led agitations against the state → women as agents of grassroots democracy.

The anti-arrack movement was a mass uprising of rural women in Andhra Pradesh in the early 1990s. It began in Dubagunta, Nellore out of the National Literacy campaign of 1990, where women met to read and named arrack as the source of their suffering.

Women led it from the front, turning a private household grievance into a public political struggle. They linked alcoholism with domestic violence, financial ruin and social breakdown. They confronted powerful liquor contractors and the state's Varun Vahini scheme supplying liquor sachets.

Susie Tham and K. Lalitha calls it as a feminist struggle, since women challenged patriarchy at home and in public life together. Vina Mazumdar sees rural women changing public policy as a turning point for the Indian women's movement, giving real meaning to "the personal is the political".

Under the pressure, CM Kotla Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy banned arrack from 1 October 1993. Women without formal power had reshaped state policy, in one of the largest women-led agitations against the state.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2024 · 20 marks

Discuss the role of environmental movements in shaping the environmental governance in India.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro
routes

- R1** Governance not state-handed → **Kohli**: societal forces and movements shaped it → local conflicts become national policy questions.
- R2** Chipko / Silent Valley / Narmada → carry sustainability, justice and equity into a debate that once called ecology a rich-nation luxury.

Body
flow

Activism gives force to Art 48-A + 51-A(g) → new statutes and bodies (EP Act, Forest Conservation Act, FRA, EIA, NGT) → PIL → judiciary as a governance actor → M. C. Mehta cases (Ganga, vehicular emissions, deforestation) → **Gadgil**: the participatory turn → People's Biodiversity Registers + Western Ghats report.

Counter-
view

Movements are not the sole driver → **Sinha**: resource-intensive development, not activism alone → **Narain**: fire-fighting, development model intact → weak implementation / localised / state-corporate / low priority.

Conclusion
routes

- R1** Rewrote how the environment is governed, not the direction of development.
- R2** Law + courts + participation reshaped; the structural development model only slowed.

Environmental governance in India was not handed down by the state. Atul Kohli argues that societal forces & environmental movements shaped it, by turning local ecological conflicts into national policy questions.

Chipko, Silent Valley and the Narmada Bachao Andolan carried sustainability, justice and equity into a debate that once dismissed ecology as a rich nation's luxury. Sustained activism gave practical force to Article 48-A and Article 51-A(g), until then enabling words on paper.

Litigation carried the pressure into the courts. PIL made the judiciary an active governance actor, and the M.C. Mehta cases on Ganga pollution, vehicular emissions and deforestation show protest and legal action reshaping regulation together.

Madhav Gadgil points to something deeper. Movements forced the state to rethink resource extraction, while People's Biodiversity Registers and the Gadgil Committee Report on the Western Ghats reflect governance that works through citizen participation.

Sabin Sinha ties governance more to the imbalances of resource intensive development than to activism. *Sunita Narain argues that most struggles only fire fight: they close a plant or stall a dam, but leave the development model intact.*

Weak implementation, localised protest, state-corporate pressure and low political priority keep the gains fragile. Therefore, these movements rewrote much of how the environment is governed.

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Tomorrow — Day 27. Don't break the chain.

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