

Perspectives on the Indian National Movement

Three strands in one sweep — the ideological currents of the 1930s, the Dalit critique of mainstream nationalism, and the six historians' lenses on the freedom struggle.

Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.

PYQ FOOTPRINT · THIS CHAPTER'S LIST (2016–2025)

8 questions · six 10-markers + two 20-markers. Dalit perspective recurs most — 2019, 2024, 2025. Marxist (2021), Socialists (2020), Radical Humanist (2016), Gandhian unity (2017).

13 Ideological Spectrum of the 1930s

13.1 Gandhian Core

Mahatma Gandhi was elected Congress President only once — at **Belgaum, 1924** — yet remained the central moral-political force.

Judith Brown: spiritual authority + political activism made him the unofficial leader of Congress. **Bipan Chandra**: expanded Congress into a mass organization.

Gandhian themes:

Swaraj Ahimsa Satyagraha Khadi Village industries Constructive work Hindu-Muslim unity Anti-untouchability

Criticism within Congress:

- **Jawaharlal Nehru** and the Left accepted mass mobilization but criticized Gandhi's suspicion of **industrialization**.
- **Karachi Session, 1931** showed socialist influence through **Fundamental Rights** and the **National Economic Programme**.

UPSC 2017 · 10m

13.2 Liberals

Leaders:

- **Tej Bahadur Sapru**
- **V.S. Srinivasa Sastri**

Beliefs:

- **Constitutional reform; Dominion Status**
- Negotiation; minority safeguards
- Gradual self-government

Role:

- **Simon Commission** discussions
- Joined **Round Table Conferences**
- Mediated British–Congress–minorities

Limitations: elite base; weak mass appeal; decline after the **1937 elections**.

Judith Brown — Liberals contributed to constitutional debate but became peripheral, unable to adapt to mass politics.

13.3 Socialists

Why socialism grew:

- **Russian Revolution**
- Working-class unrest; peasant distress
- Disillusionment after **Non-Cooperation**
- Pull on young Congress leaders

Important leaders:

- **Jawaharlal Nehru · Subhas Chandra Bose**
- **Jayaprakash Narayan · Acharya Narendra Deva**
- **Ram Manohar Lohia · Basawon Singh Sinha**
- **Minoo Masani**

CONGRESS SOCIALIST PARTY (1934)

Formed within Congress · aim: **radicalize Congress, not break it** · mobilized workers and peasants · opposed communalism.

- **Jayaprakash Narayan** in *Why Socialism?* — criticized Gandhian idealism, stressed **class contradictions**.
- **Acharya Narendra Deva** — class reconciliation is impractical.
- **Ram Manohar Lohia** — fused Marxist + Gandhian ideas into **decentralized socialism**.
- **Subhas Chandra Bose** — social revolution alongside political liberation.
- **Jawaharlal Nehru** (1929) — openly identified as socialist and republican.

Wider social base & afterlife: the **Hindustan Socialist Republican Association** gave revolutionary nationalism a socialist–secular direction; the **All India Kisan Sabha** and trade unions widened the anti-colonial base; socialists ran an underground role in **Quit India**; influence carried into planning, the public sector, land reform and the Directive Principles.

UPSC 2020 · 10m (150 words)



13.4 Communists

COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA

Founded 1925 · repressed through the **Meerut Conspiracy Case, 1929** · reorganized 1933 · recognized by the **Communist International**.

Leaders:

- **M.N. Roy · S.A. Dange**
- **Muzaffar Ahmed · P.C. Joshi**
- **Sohan Singh Joshi**

Position:

- Anti-imperialism through **class struggle**
- Early critique of Congress as **bourgeois**
- Later **Popular Front** → cooperation with the CSP

John Patrick Haithcox — the CPI moved between ideological purity and practical alliances.

13.5 Forward Bloc

Subhas Chandra Bose formed the **Forward Bloc in 1939**, after his break with Gandhi.

Objectives: consolidate left forces · intensify the anti-British struggle · combine socialism and nationalism · reject excessive reliance on non-violence.

Leonard Gordon — Bose balanced revolutionary zeal with organizational pragmatism.

17 Dalit Perspective & Dalit Struggle

17.1 Social Reformers & Movements

Dalit and anti-caste movements challenged the **social limits** of mainstream nationalism.

Key figures:

- Jyotirao Phule · Narayana Guru
- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar
- E.V. Ramasamy Periyar · Shahu Maharaj

Key movements:

- Satyashodhak Samaj · Self-Respect Movement
- Ad-Dharm (Punjab, 1926) · Mahar (Maharashtra)
- Namasudra (Bengal) · Adi-Dravida (Tamil Nadu)
- Adi-Andhra · Adi-Karnataka · Adi-Hindu (UP)
- Pulaya & Cheruman mobilization (Kerala)

One caste, one religion, one god for mankind.

— Narayana Guru

Jyotirao Phule: attacked Brahmanical domination; held that lower castes were the original inhabitants enslaved by Aryans.

British Raj is better than Peshwa Raj.

— Jyotirao Phule (on equality before law)

17.2 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar & Dalit Nationalism

Ambedkar's nationalism centres on:

Liberty Equality Fraternity Dignity Representation Annihilation of caste

If Tilak was born as untouchable he would have demanded annihilation of caste as his birth right.

— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

In Pakistan or the Partition of India, he defines nationalism as **consciousness of kind** and awareness of the tie of kinship.

AMBEDKAR'S FORMULATION

Nationalism is negation of casteism, communism, and is rooted in humanism.

- A country cannot be free if its people remain **socially enslaved**.
- **Political democracy without social democracy** creates contradiction.
- No nation can exist without **fraternity**.
- Dalits need **independent political representation**.

We are not going to get anything unless we have our own men in the legislatures.

— Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

17.3 Critique of the Indian National Congress

- Congress was **upper-caste dominated**; political independence overshadowed caste annihilation.
- Social reform stayed secondary; **separate electorates** opposed by Gandhi; the **Poona Pact** forced compromise.
- Congress did not fully back the **Mahad Satyagraha**.

Ambedkar charged Congress with being a "**Brahmin-Baniya**" party.

- **K.N. Panikkar** — the movement's limit lay in the **disjunction** between political and social-cultural struggle.
- **T.K. Oommen** — Dalit deprivation arose from low ritual status, poverty and powerlessness.
- **Arundhati Roy** — Gandhi's non-participation in Mahad deepened Ambedkar's disenchantment.
- **S.N. Gaikwad** — Ambedkar was rejecting elite hegemony, **not** nationalism.
- **Arun Shourie** read Ambedkar as anti-national — a reading Dalit scholarship rejects.

17.4 Contribution to Egalitarianism

Through:

- Anti-caste critique; equal access to public facilities
- **Mahad Satyagraha, 1927**; temple-entry movements
- Political safeguards; separate-electorate demand
- **Scheduled Castes Federation**
- **Independent Labour Party, 1936**

Constitutional impact:

- **Article 17** — abolition of untouchability
- **Articles 15 & 16** — against discrimination
- Reservations; political representation
- Affirmative action; social justice

...the Dalit movement and the overall radical anti-caste movements were a crucial expression of the democratic revolution in India, more consistently democratic — and in the end more consistently "nationalistic" — than the elite controlled Indian National Congress.

— Gail Omvedt

Valerian Rodrigues — Dalit-Bahujan thinkers saw the nation as a **good society** built on mutual respect, rights and solidarity.

Kancha Ilaiah — Dalit movements made **dignity and participation** central to nation-building.

Bahishkrit Bharat
ostracized India
exclusion · humiliation

annihilation of caste ·
fraternity · representation

Prabuddha Bharat
enlightened India
equality · fraternity

Ambedkar's social arc — from excluded India to enlightened India.

17.5 Assessment

THE CORE CLAIM

The Dalit perspective is **not** anti-national. It asks: freedom for whom? · a nation on what social basis? · can a caste society become a fraternity? · can political Swaraj exist without social equality?

UPSC 2019 · 10m

UPSC 2024 · 20m

UPSC 2025 · 10m

18 Historiographical Perspectives on the National Movement



Six lenses, one movement — each answers "how should we read the freedom struggle?" differently.

18.1 Colonialist Perspective

Claim: India was not a nation; British rule created order and unity; Congress was an elite agitation.

Writers: James Mill · Mountstuart Elphinstone · Henry M. Elliot · John Dowson · William Wilson Hunter · Herbert Hope Risley · Vincent Arthur Smith · Valentine Chirol · John Strachey · Sir John Robert Seeley.

A variegated jumble of races and peoples.

— Valentine Chirol, on India

Criticism: ignored anti-imperialist consciousness; justified colonial rule; reduced Indian politics to division.

18.2 Nationalist Perspective

Claim: India had a growing modern unity or an ancient civilizational unity; Congress represented national awakening; leaders were patriotic and selfless; economic exploitation, racial discrimination and repression generated nationalism.

Scholars & leaders: Surendranath Banerjee · Bisheshwar Prasad · Ramesh Chandra Majumdar · Tara Chand · Radha Kumud Mookerji · Har Bilas Sarda · Lala Lajpat Rai · Kashi Prasad Jayaswal · Rabindranath Tagore · Mahatma Gandhi · Subhas Chandra Bose · Jawaharlal Nehru · C.F. Andrews · Girija Mukerji.

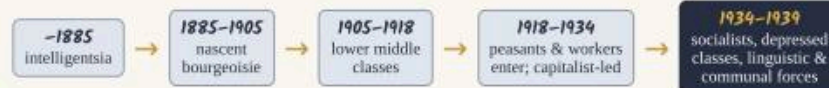
Limit: sometimes overemphasized unity; underplayed caste, class and subaltern autonomy.

18.3 Marxist Perspective

Claim: nationalism emerged within **colonial capitalism**; Congress was influenced by bourgeois interests; anti-imperialism coexisted with class contradictions.

Thinkers: M.N. Roy · S.A. Dange · Rajani Palme Dutt · A.R. Desai · E.M.S. Namboodiripad · Hiren Mukherjee · Sumit Sarkar · Bipan Chandra · Irfan Habib.

Thinker	Position
M.N. Roy <i>India in Transition</i> , 1922	Indian nationalism reflected global capitalism; the bourgeoisie initiated it; the working class alone could be genuinely revolutionary.
Rajani Palme Dutt <i>India Today</i>	1857 was feudal; Congress began as a tool of British policy, later turning national under popular pressure; Gandhi the "mascot of the bourgeoisie."
E.M.S. Namboodiripad	Described the Gandhian struggle as a restricted mass struggle .
Bipan Chandra	Early — ideas have autonomy, intellectuals not mere class agents. Later — used Gramsci's war of position ; Gandhian non-violence was strategic mass politics, not bourgeois pacification.
Sumit Sarkar	Criticized crude class analysis; used Trotsky's "substitutionism" and Gramsci's traditional/organic intellectuals; saw overlap between Gandhian leadership and bourgeois interests without reducing Gandhi to a puppet.



A.R. Desai — five phases of the movement by its changing class base.

UPSC 2021 · 10m UPSC 2019 · 20m

18.4 Cambridge School

Historians: John Gallagher · Ronald Robinson · Anil Seal · Gordon Johnson · Christopher Alan Bayly · David Washbrook · Christopher John Baker · Brian Roger Tomlinson.

Arguments:

- No central contradiction between imperialism and the Indian people; the main conflict was **among Indian elites**.
- Nationalism emerged from competition for **offices and representation**.
- Politics was driven by caste, community, locality and **patron-client networks**; Congress rhetoric often masked local interests.

Much attention has been paid to the apparent conflicts between imperialism and nationalism; it would be at least equally profitable to study their real partnerships.

— Anil Seal

Criticism: downplays anti-imperialism; echoes colonialist scepticism; underestimates mass movements and sacrifices.

18.5 Subaltern Perspective

Scholars: Ranajit Guha · Gyanendra Pandey · Shahid Amin · David Hardiman · Sumit Sarkar · Partha Chatterjee · Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Core arguments: elite historiography ignored people's politics; peasants, workers and tribals had **autonomous political domains**; subaltern mobilization was horizontal, spontaneous and militant; elite nationalism restrained popular radicalism.

- **Ranajit Guha** — in *The Prose of Counter-Insurgency*, attacked accounts that denied rebel consciousness.
- **Gyanendra Pandey** — the Awadh peasant revolt arose independently of Non-Cooperation.
- **Shahid Amin** — studied popular appropriation of Gandhi as *Mahatma*.
- **Sumit Sarkar** — masses in Bengal sometimes outpaced the leaders.
- **Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak** — questioned whether the subaltern can truly "speak" in history.
- **Partha Chatterjee** — introduced the idea of the "subalternity of the elite".

Criticism: overstates autonomy; underestimates nationalist influence; the later postmodern turn weakened attention to material conditions.

18.6 Radical Humanist Perspective

M.N. Roy's **Radical Humanism** (New Humanism) centres on the individual. Key work: *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*.

Principles:

Critique of nationalism:

- Individual is prior to society; individual is an **end**, society a **means**
- Freedom and truth are fundamental urges
- Reason is biological and moral; ethics is necessary for politics
- History is shaped by ideas and human will, not economics alone
- Collectivist nationalism suppresses individual freedom
- Political independence alone is insufficient
- Congress and Gandhi ignored rational-ethical awakening
- Religious mobilization reinforced traditionalism
- Parliamentary democracy bred power-seeking parties

ROY'S ALTERNATIVE

Party-less democracy · decentralized people's committees · radical democracy · compulsory education · purification of politics · nationalization of land · abolition of feudalism · minority rights · modernized industry.

His (M.N. Roy) innovative reconceptualization has resulted into astonishingly daring radicalism and tragic heteronomy.

— Sudipto Kaviraj

Limitations: party-less democracy is hard in a mass society; underestimates collective identities; assumes high civic education before any democratic restructuring.

UPSC 2016 · 10m

Power Quotes

“One caste, one religion, one god for mankind. — Narayana Guru

“If Tilak was born as untouchable he would have demanded annihilation of caste as his birth right. — Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

“Nationalism is negation of casteism, communism, and is rooted in humanism. — Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

“We are not going to get anything unless we have our own men in the legislatures. — Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

“...more consistently democratic — and in the end more consistently “nationalistic” — than the elite controlled Indian National Congress. — Gail Omvedt

“A variegated jumble of races and peoples. — Valentine Chirol (on India)

“...study their real partnerships [imperialism and nationalism]. — Anil Seal

“...astonishingly daring radicalism and tragic heteronomy. — Sudipto Kaviraj (on M.N. Roy)

Scholar Index — cover the names, then recall the position

Acharya Narendra Deva · Anil Seal · A.R. Desai · Arundhati Roy · Arun Shourie · B.R. Ambedkar · Basawon Singh Sinha · Bipan Chandra · Bisheshwar Prasad · Brian Roger Tomlinson · C.F. Andrews · Christopher Alan Bayly · Christopher John Baker · David Hardiman · David Washbrook · E.M.S. Namboodiripad · E.V. Ramasamy Periyar · Gail Omvedt · Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak · Girija Mukerji · Gordon Johnson · Gyanendra Pandey · Har Bilas Sarda · Henry M. Elliot · Herbert Hope Risley · Hiren Mukherjee · Irfan Habib · James Mill · Jawaharlal Nehru · Jayaprakash Narayan · John Dowson · John Gallagher · John Patrick Haithcox · John Strachey · Judith Brown · Jyotirao Phule · Kancha Ilaiah · Kashi Prasad Jayaswal · K.N. Panikkar · Lala Lajpat Rai · Leonard Gordon · Minoo Masani · M.N. Roy · Mountstuart Elphinstone · Muzaffar Ahmed · Narayana Guru · Partha Chatterjee · P.C. Joshi · Radha Kumud Mookerji · Rabindranath Tagore · Rajani Palme Dutt · Ramesh Chandra Majumdar · Ram Manohar Lohia · Ranajit Guha · Ronald Robinson · S.A. Dange · Shahid Amin · Shahu Maharaj · Sir John Robert Seeley · S.N. Gaikwad · Sohan Singh Joshi · Subhas Chandra Bose · Sudipto Kaviraj · Sumit Sarkar · Surendranath Banerjea · Tara Chand · Tej Bahadur Sapru · T.K. Oommen · Valentine Chirol · Valerian Rodrigues · Vincent Arthur Smith · V.S. Srinivasa Sastri · William Wilson Hunter

◆ How UPSC Asks It

Theme	PYQs (from this chapter)
Radical Humanist perspective on the INM	2016 · 10m
Gandhi unifying political & non-political movements	2017 · 10m
Dalit perspective on the INM	2019 · 10m 2025 · 10m
Anti-imperialist & increasingly radical programmes	2019 · 20m
Role of Socialists in the INM (150 words)	2020 · 10m
Marxist perspective on the nature of the INM	2021 · 10m
Dalit struggle & egalitarianism in the freedom movement	2024 · 20m

🔑 Today's Practice

- Analyze the Marxist perspective of the nature of Indian National Movement. **UPSC 2021 · 10m**
- Discuss the contribution of the Dalit struggle to establish egalitarianism in Indian society during the freedom movement. **UPSC 2024 · 20m**
- Critically examine the Radical Humanist perspective on the Indian National Movement. **UPSC 2016 · 10m**

Write it before you read the answer.

Model answers drop tonight on [@psirbyamitpratap](#).

Blank on a point above? It's covered in full in your **Foundation** / OGP class notes & handouts — revise it, then write.

See you tomorrow with Day 17 — keep the chain going.