

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2021 · 10 marks

Comment on affirmative action.

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 most contested instrument of substantive equality → deliberate support for historically disadvantaged groups
R2 India = reservation in education / employment / legislatures → Articles 15 & 16

Body flow

equal rules → fair conditions → past injustice + structural exclusion → **Rawls** (difference principle, least advantaged) → **Ambedkar** (political democracy needs social democracy) → **Sowell** (reverse discrimination, merit, division) → creamy layer + self-perpetuation → counter: merit socially produced + right, not charity

Counter-view

reverse discrimination, merit erosion, social division, creamy layer → rights / socially-produced merit / inclusion

Conclusion routes

R1 necessary for distributive justice → must stay calibrated (evolving criteria, creamy-layer exclusion, review)
R2 Ram Singh, 2015 → continuous review so deserving benefit

Affirmative action is the most contested instrument of substantive equality. It refers to deliberate policies that support historically disadvantaged groups; in India its main form is reservation in education, employment & legislatures, resting on Article 15 and 16.

It seeks to move from equal rules to fair conditions, redressing past injustice and continuing structural exclusion. John Rawls difference principle justifies priority to the least advantaged.

B.R. Ambedkar argued that political democracy needs social democracy to remove inequalities of status and opportunity.

Critics such as Thomas Sowell see it as reverse discrimination that weakens merit and deepens social division. Problems of creamy layer and self-perpetuation are real. Yet merit itself is socially produced and inclusion is a right not charity.

Affirmative action thus remains necessary for distributive justice. It must stay calibrated - using evolving criteria, creamy layer exclusion and periodic review as the Ram Singh case, 2015 affirmed.