

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

UPSC 2025 · 15 marks

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

FLOW SNAPSHOT — how the answer moves

Intro routes

R1 state = “concentrated, organised violence” / soulless machine
→ hence fear that its growth destroys individuality

R2 the paradox: state “doing good” by curbing exploitation, yet harming most by killing individuality

Body flow

rests on coercion + bureaucracy + uniform rules → expansion reduces citizens to subjects → kills conscience, voluntary action, moral responsibility = true roots of progress → individual “the one supreme consideration” → rejects Austinian absolute sovereignty (**Austin**) → state a means, not final ideal

Counter-view

individuality ≠ unrestrained individualism → “law of the beast of the jungle” → freedom balanced by duty → **Green**: community by common good, not compulsion

Conclusion routes

R1 remedy: limit the state → Satyagraha + Gram Swaraj → individual at the centre

R2 warning stays relevant wherever welfare / security justify over-centralisation

For Mahatma Gandhi, the modern state was "violence in a concentrated and organised form" – a soulless machine resting on coercion, bureaucracy and uniform rules. From this followed his deepest fear: that even when the state appears to do good by minimising exploitation, its growing power does the greatest harm by crushing individuality.

The statement turns on a paradox. State expansion, however well-meant, reduces citizens to subjects. Uniform command leaves no room for conscience, voluntary action or moral responsibility – and these, not material output, are the true roots of progress. Gandhi therefore held the individual to be "the one supreme consideration", and rejected Austinian idea of absolute sovereignty associated with John Austin: the state is a means, never the final idea.

This is not selfish individualism. "Unrestricted individualism is the law of the beast of the jungle"; freedom must be balanced by duty. Like Thomas Hill Green, Gandhi saw community as held together by common good, not compulsion.

His remedy was to limit the state and place the person at the centre - Satyagraha to resist unjust law & Gram Swaraj to revive self-governing villages. The warning remains relevant wherever welfare or security justifies excessive centralisation.