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Q2(b)

Discuss Mahatma Gandhi's concept of seven sins.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS IV · 10 marks · Moral Thinkers and Philosophers

Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and the world.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss **Mahatma Gandhi's** concept of seven sins

Revision summary

Gandhi's seven sins pair a human good with a missing moral limit.

The pairings are wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principle.

He is not against wealth or science; he is against those goods with ethics cut out.

In public service they name tenders without morality, exams without character, and projects without humanity.

The list is a compact ethic; it does not replace law, and "work" must include care and the vulnerable.

Introduction

- **Gandhi listed seven social sins as pairings:** a good thing cut off from a moral limit. Wealth, pleasure, knowledge, commerce, science, worship and politics each become a sin when they lose work, conscience, character, morality, humanity, sacrifice or principle. The list is a public-ethics exam, not a temple slogan.

Body**The seven pairings**

- **Wealth without work is income detached from honest labour:** rent-seeking, a bribe, a speculative killing that produces nothing, or a farm subsidy captured by a benami owner.
- **Pleasure without conscience is enjoyment that ignores who pays:** bonded labour behind a luxury, a tourist economy that wrecks a coast, or private vice that treats a person as a toy.
- **Knowledge without character is skill without a spine:** a doctor who sells a fake trial, an accountant who signs a Satyam-like book, or a civil servant who drafts a legal-looking loot.
- Commerce without morality is trade that cheats weight, poisons food, hides a related-party deal, or sells weapons with a lie. Profit is allowed; fraud is not.
- **Science without humanity is technique that forgets the person:** a trial on the poor, a polluting plant with no consent, or a surveillance tool with no law.
- Worship without sacrifice (sometimes listed as religion without sacrifice) is piety that never costs the worshipper: a televised ritual beside an unpaid worker, or prayer used as a cover for hate.

- **Politics without principle is power as a career of deals:** communal arithmetic, bought votes, and a manifesto dropped the day after polling.

Why **Gandhi** joined them this way

- Each first word is a human good. **Gandhi** is not against wealth, science or politics. He is against the good with the ethical organ removed.
- **The list is social:** the sin is not only private vice but a pattern that harms the last person in the queue.
- **It fits trusteeship:** property and office are held for others. Wealth without work is a refusal of that trust.
- **It fits means-and-ends:** politics without principle is the claim that any means will do if the flag is large.

Present public-service reading

- A tender without competition is commerce without morality inside the State.
- An examination leak is knowledge without character at industrial scale.
- A development project that erases a forest people without a hearing is science and wealth without humanity.
- A leader who uses a shrine as a vote bank is worship without sacrifice and politics without principle at once.
- **Swachh Bharat**, tax honesty and a clean affidavit are small opposites of these sins.
- **For an officer the list is a daily checklist:** did this file add wealth without work for someone? Did this circular use science without the people who live downstream?

Limits of the list

- **Gandhi's** language is moral and terse. It does not replace statutes, courts or economics.
- "Work" must not be read as contempt for the disabled, the old, or unpaid care, which is also work.
- Used well, the seven sins remain a compact ethic for a market democracy that is rich in tools and poor in restraint.

Flow diagram

Seven social sins -> Wealth without work
 Seven social sins -> Pleasure without conscience
 Seven social sins -> Knowledge without character
 Seven social sins -> Commerce without morality
 Seven social sins -> Science without humanity
 Seven social sins -> Worship without sacrifice
 Seven social sins -> Politics without principle

Conclusion

Gandhi's seven sins are seven goods uncoupled from duty. They still name India's live failures: easy money, clever fraud, cruel technique and unprincipled power. The cure is the missing second word - work, conscience, character, morality, humanity, sacrifice and principle - in the file as well as in the ashram.

Facts & figures

Seven social sins

A list associated with **Gandhi**, published in Young India in 1925 from a formulation he endorsed, pairing goods with missing virtues.

Trusteeship

Gandhi's idea that wealth and office are held in trust for society, the opposite of wealth without work.

Means and ends

Gandhi's insistence that impure means corrupt the goal, which is the core of politics without principle.

Young India

The journal through which **Gandhi** circulated political and ethical teaching, including the seven-sins list.

Sarvodaya

Welfare of all; the positive programme against a society organised around the seven sins.

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