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Q3

(a) What teachings of Buddha are most relevant today and why? Discuss. (b) "The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty." Examine this statement in the context of international relations.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS IV · 10 marks · Ethics and Human Interface

Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in-human actions; dimensions of ethics; ethics - in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators; role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.

Core demand of the question

- (a) What teachings of **Buddha** are most relevant today and why? Discuss
- (b) "The will to power exists, but it can be tamed and be guided by rationality and principles of moral duty." Examine this statement in the context of international relations

Revision summary

The Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, middle way, compassion and mindfulness are the Buddhist teachings most usable now.

They speak to consumption, hate speech, ecology and stressed officials, without making Buddhism the State.

The will to power exists in international relations.

It can be guided by strategic reason and by duties in the Charter, treaties and humanitarian law.

The leash fails when a State exempts itself; ethics applies the duty at home as well.

Introduction

The present is loud with craving, rage and great-power theatre. Part (a) asks which of the **Buddha's** teachings still work as public ethics. Part (b) asks whether the will to dominate, which is real in world politics, can be leashed by reason and duty.

Body**(a) Buddha's teachings most relevant today**

- **The Four Noble Truths remain a diagnosis of public life:** there is suffering; it has causes (craving, hatred, ignorance); it can cease; there is a path. Today's addictions - to consumption, to outrage, to status - fit that diagnosis better than a new slogan.
- The Noble Eightfold Path (right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration) is a civic syllabus: speech that does not smear, livelihood that does not prey, action that does not harm.

- Ahimsa and compassion (karuna) are relevant to lynching, majoritarian humiliation, and to a development model that treats a river or a forest as an enemy. They do not forbid a police function; they forbid cruelty as policy.
- **The Middle Path is relevant to polarisation:** neither indulgence in hate-media nor a fake other-worldly withdrawal from voting, paying tax and protecting the weak.
- Anatta and non-clinging challenge identity politics that freezes a person as only a caste or a handle. A citizen is more than the group that claims them.
- **Mindfulness is relevant to a civil servant and a soldier under stress:** notice the surge before the illegal blow or the communal FIR.
- **Dependent origination (pratityasamutpada) is an ecological and social teaching:** a factory's effluent, a rumour's share, and a child's malnutrition are not isolated accidents.
- **Why today:** mental-health load, climate overshoot, fake news, and great-power nuclear risk are all forms of tanha and avijja at scale.
- **Limit:** Buddhist ethics is not a State religion. Relevance means usable precepts inside a secular Constitution, not a theocracy of any sangha.
- **Limit:** compassion is not pacifism that abandons a victim. The State still owes [Article 21](#) protection; the teaching judges the motive and the excess, not the existence of law.

(b) Will to power tamed by rationality and moral duty in IR

- The will to power, in Nietzsche's phrase and in realist IR, is the drive of States (and of leaders) to survive, rank and dominate. It exists. Denying it is sentiment, not analysis.
- Classical realism (Morgenthau) and structural realism (Waltz) treat that drive as the default of anarchy. The quote does not deny the default. It claims a leash.
- **Rationality in IR:** cost-benefit that includes second-strike, trade, reputation and the risk of a war nobody can win. Nuclear deterrence is a grim rationality; so is a climate treaty that notices a shared atmosphere.
- **Moral duty in IR:** pacta sunt servanda; distinction and proportionality in IHL; duties in the UN Charter against aggressive war; non-refoulement as a humanitarian floor; common but differentiated climate duty.
- **Taming, historically:** the Peace of Westphalia's mutual recognition; the UN system after 1945; NPT and export-control regimes; the nuclear taboo; WTO rules; and India's own record of UN peacekeeping and a no-first-use nuclear doctrine as attempted restraint.
- **India's neighbourhood:** a will to influence is real. Duty and reason require that smaller neighbours are not humiliated, that refugees are not used as pawns, and that water and trade disputes stay in institutions.
- **Failure of the leash:** Iraq 2003 on a false brief; great-power veto paralysis on mass killing; arms dumped into a civil war; and majoritarianism exported as foreign policy. The will to power then eats the claim of civilisation.
- The quote is therefore right as a project, not as a completed fact. Power can be guided: coalitions, law, verification, and domestic ethics that do not cheer a war crime.
- It is wrong if read as a guarantee. Rationality can also be the rationality of a predator. Moral duty must bind the calculation, including for one's own State.
- **Ethical close for an Indian officer and diplomat:** pursue national interest, tell the truth about threats, and still refuse means - torture, fake maps, starving civilians - that make the interest barbarian.

Flow diagram

Buddha -> Four Noble Truths
Buddha -> Middle path and ahimsa
Buddha -> Mindfulness
Four Noble Truths -> Public ethics today
Will to power -> Realist drive
Rationality -> Tamed IR
Moral duty IHL UN -> Tamed IR
Realist drive -> Tamed IR

Conclusion

Buddha's truths, path, middle way, compassion and mindfulness still name today's craving, hate and ecological entanglement, inside a secular State. The will to power in IR is real; rationality and moral duty can tame it when law, verification and conscience bind one's own flag, not only the rival's.

Facts & figures

Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path

Core early Buddhist teaching on suffering, its causes, its cessation and the eightfold discipline of speech, action and mind.

UN Charter, 1945

Binds members to refrain from threat or use of force against territorial integrity except in self-defence or Security Council authorisation - a legal taming of the will to power.

International humanitarian law

Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols require distinction and proportionality; moral duty with a statute book.

India's nuclear doctrine

Credible minimum deterrence and a declared no-first-use posture as an attempt to bind strategic power to restraint.

Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 1968

An imperfect but central regime that tries to separate nuclear will from unlimited spread.

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