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Q4(a)

Buddhist thought on Dhamma facilitates the emancipation of political action. Explain

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Indian Political Thought

Indian Political Thought: Dharmashastra, Arthashastra and Buddhist traditions; Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, Sri Aurobindo, M.K. Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, M.N. Roy.

Core demand of the question

- Buddhist thought on Dhamma facilitates the emancipation of political action. Explain. (20 marks)

Revision summary

Dhamma is a public ethic of right conduct, non-injury, and welfare, not a priestly monopoly.

It measures kingship by protection of the weak rather than by sacrifice or by Hobbesian war.

The sangha's procedures and Ashoka's edicts treat political action as morally accountable.

Ambedkar restated Dhamma as liberty, equality, and fraternity against caste.

Emancipation is of political action from birth-rank and from force as the only law; it is not a claim that Buddhist states never used force.

Introduction

In Buddhist usage, Dhamma is the teaching of right conduct, non-injury, and the ending of craving. The claim of the question is that this teaching frees political action from ritual kingship, caste rank, and the war of unrestrained self-preservation. Emancipation here means that public action can be judged by a moral law that is not the same as a priest's monopoly or a sovereign's sword.

Body**Dhamma as a public standard**

- Early Buddhist teaching placed intention, non-violence, and the Middle Path above birth as a measure of worth, which undercuts hereditary rank as a political title.
- **The king is asked to rule by Dhamma:** protection of the weak, just punishment, and welfare, rather than by sacrifice alone.
- Ashoka's edicts after the Kalinga war state repentance, public works, and moral instruction as the business of rule, which is political action measured by Dhamma.
- This is not a theocracy. It is a lay public ethic that officials and householders can practise without a Vedic intermediary.

Emancipation of political action

- Against Hobbes, political action need not begin from a state of war of all against all; Dhamma names fear, hatred, and greed as the causes to be reduced, not as the nature to be armed.

- Against a closed ritual order, action in the assembly, the sangha's own procedural rules of debate, and the king's welfare work become legitimate public acts.
- **B. R. Ambedkar's** *The Buddha and His Dhamma* and the 1956 conversion treated Dhamma as a religion of liberty, equality, and fraternity for those excluded by caste.
- **Ambedkar's** triad Educate, Agitate, Organise is political action emancipated from waiting for upper-caste conscience, and he presented Navayana Buddhism as its ethical ground.
- **Article 17** and the constitutional language of liberty, equality, and fraternity are the legal form of that emancipation in the republic.

Limits and comparisons

- Buddhist kingship could still wage war and collect tax; Dhamma is a criterion, not a guarantee of pacific history.
- **Gandhi's** ahimsa and satyagraha overlap with Dhamma in non-injury, but **Gandhi** kept a Hindu social vocabulary that **Ambedkar** rejected as insufficient for civil liberty.
- **Aurobindo's** spiritual swaraj is another Indian path of inner freedom; Buddhist Dhamma is more this-worldly in its attention to suffering and institutional **sangha procedure**.
- **Rawls's** public reason and **Mill's** harm principle can converse with Dhamma as a public ethic, without baptising the state as a church.
- **Foucault** would note that moral instruction is also a government of conduct; emancipation is therefore unfinished if Dhamma becomes only a new discipline.

What the explanation must conclude

- Dhamma emancipates political action by giving it a standard of non-injury, welfare, and equal moral worth independent of birth and of pure force.
- In India that standard was restated by **Ashoka** and by **Ambedkar** as a programme of civil liberty, not as withdrawal from politics.

Flow diagram

Dhamma -> Non-injury and welfare
 Dhamma -> Worth not by birth
 Worth not by birth -> Emancipated political action
 Emancipated political action -> Ashoka edicts
 Emancipated political action -> Ambedkar Navayana

Conclusion

Buddhist Dhamma frees political action from war-as-nature, from birth-rank, and from ritual monopoly, by measuring rule against non-injury and welfare. **Ashoka** and **Ambedkar** are the two Indian public statements of that emancipation. The republic's equality clauses are its legal residue.

Facts & figures

Ashokan edicts

After Kalinga, **Ashoka** published repentance, public works, and moral instruction as the content of Dhamma-rule.

The Buddha and His Dhamma

Ambedkar's 1957 text presenting the Buddha's teaching as a social gospel of equality.

Nagpur, 1956

Ambedkar's conversion with followers, a mass political-religious act of exit from caste Hinduism.

Article 17

Abolition of untouchability, the constitutional companion of Ambedkar's Dhamma of equal worth.

Sangha procedure

Monastic rules of motion, debate, and consensus that model non-hereditary public decision.

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