

CUET · POLITICAL SCIENCE · CLASS XI · CODE 323

# Freedom

CUET unit: Political Theory — Freedom, Liberty and related concepts

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## Snapshot

- Defines freedom as both the **absence of external constraints** and the **expansion of opportunities** for self-expression and self-development — a twin formulation that drives almost every CUET question on this topic.
- Uses two living examples — Nelson Mandela's **Long Walk to Freedom** (apartheid, 27 years in jail) and Aung San Suu Kyi's **Freedom from Fear** (Myanmar house arrest) — to ground the abstract idea in real struggles.
- Introduces the Indian concept of **Swaraj** — Tilak's "birthright" slogan plus Gandhi's **Hind Swaraj** (1909) idea of "rule over the self" — as the indigenous analogue of liberty.
- Explains **John Stuart Mill's** harm principle from **On Liberty** — the only justification for interfering with an individual's liberty is to prevent harm to others — and distinguishes **self-regarding** from **other-regarding** actions.
- Distinguishes **Negative liberty** (freedom from — "over what area am I the master?") from **Positive liberty** (freedom to — "who governs me?"), linking the latter to Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Gandhi and Aurobindo.
- Surveys Mill's four arguments for freedom of expression and the Indian constitutional doctrine of **reasonable restrictions** — both favourite CUET pickings — closing with the responsibility that comes with the capacity to choose.

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

Human history is full of domination and exploitation by powerful groups — and equally full of "inspiring examples of heroic struggles" against such domination (NCERT Overview, p. 17). The essence of freedom is the desire of people to be **in control of their own lives and destinies** and to have the opportunity to express themselves freely through their choices and activities; not only individuals but also societies value their independence and wish to protect their culture and future (NCERT Overview, p. 17). At the same time, any form of social living requires **some** rules and regulation, and the central task of political theory is to "evolve principles by which we can distinguish between **socially necessary constraints** and other restrictions" (NCERT Overview, p. 17). The questions that follow are which constraints are justifiable, what limits social

and economic structures place on freedom, and how negative and positive dimensions of freedom interact.

**§ 2.1 The Ideal of Freedom** (pp. 18–19) rests on two case studies. **Nelson Mandela** spent twenty-seven years in jail, often in solitary confinement, leading the struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa; his autobiography **Long Walk to Freedom** describes a campaign to remove constraints — segregation, township ghettos, restrictions on movement, denial of free choice of marriage partner — imposed by the apartheid regime on **all** South Africans, black, coloured and white (NCERT §2.1, p. 18). **Aung San Suu Kyi** spent years under house arrest in Myanmar, separated from her children and unable to visit her husband as he died of cancer; her book of essays **Freedom from Fear** contains her famous formulation: "for me real freedom is freedom from fear and unless you can live free from fear you cannot live a dignified human life" (NCERT §2.1, p. 19). These struggles connect to the wider Asian-African resistance against British, French and Portuguese colonialism.

**§ 2.2 What is Freedom?** (pp. 19–21). The simple answer is the **absence of constraints**: an individual is free when not subject to external controls or coercion and can make autonomous decisions. A second dimension follows: "freedom is also about **expanding the ability of people to freely express themselves and develop their potential**" — the condition in which people can develop their creativity and capabilities (NCERT §2.2, pp. 19–20). "No individual living in society can hope to enjoy total absence of any kind of constraints or restrictions" (p. 20), so the task is to determine **which** constraints are justified. The boxed concept of **Swaraj** (p. 20) provides the Indian analogue: **Sw** (Self) + **Raj** (Rule) = both rule of the self **and** rule over self. NCERT cites Tilak — "**Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it**" — and Gandhi's **Hind Swaraj** (1909): "It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves." Swaraj, NCERT clarifies, "is not just freedom but liberation in redeeming one's self-respect, self-responsibility, and capacities for self-realisation from institutions of dehumanisation" (NCERT Box "Swaraj", p. 20).

The same section then distinguishes **sources of constraint**. Restrictions may come from domination and external controls imposed by force or by government laws — colonial rulers, the apartheid system. Democratic government is therefore "an important means of protecting the freedom of people" because members of a state retain some control over their rulers (NCERT §2.2, p. 21). But constraints can also result from **social inequality** (the caste system) or **extreme economic inequality**. The Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose box (Presidential Address, Students' Conference, Lahore, **19 October 1929**, p. 22) is invoked here to push the meaning of freedom outward to "**all round freedom**" — freedom for the individual **and** for society, for rich **and** poor, for men **and** women — which implies "not only emancipation from political bondage but also equal distribution of wealth, abolition of caste barriers and social iniquities and destruction of communalism and religious intolerance" (NCERT p. 22).

**§ 2.3 Why do we need constraints?** (pp. 22–23). Without constraints society would descend into chaos because people have conflicting ideas, ambitions and competing

claims on scarce resources. Every society needs mechanisms to control violence and settle disputes; legal and political restraints are necessary so that differences may be discussed and debated without one group coercively imposing its views on another. The question is therefore **which** constraints are justifiable and **which** are not, and whether any areas of life must remain free of all external constraint. The boxed concept of **Liberalism** (p. 23) defines this ideology as one that values **tolerance**, is **focused on the individual** (not family/community), gives priority to individual liberty over equality, is suspicious of political authority, historically favoured the free market but in its present-day form "accepts the need for measures to reduce both social and economic inequalities" through the welfare state (NCERT Box "Liberalism", p. 23).

**§ 2.4 Harm Principle** (pp. 23–26). **John Stuart Mill**, in **On Liberty**: "...the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the **only purpose** for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is **to prevent harm to others**" (NCERT §2.4, p. 24). Mill distinguishes **self-regarding actions** (consequences only for the actor — no case for state interference) from **other-regarding actions** (consequences for others — case for external interference) (NCERT §2.4, p. 24). The harm must be **serious**: for minor harm — loud music in an apartment building, for instance — Mill recommends only **social disapproval**, not the force of law (NCERT §2.4, pp. 24–25). "In the constitutional discussions in India, the term used for such justifiable constraints is '**reasonable restrictions**'" — restrictions defensible by reason, not excessive, not out of proportion to the action being restricted (NCERT §2.4, p. 26).

**§ 2.5 Negative and Positive Liberty** (pp. 26–28) names the two traditions in political theory. **Negative liberty** defends an "inviolable minimum area of non-interference" in which the individual can "do, be or become" whatever he or she wishes — it answers the question "**over what area am I the master?**" and is concerned with "**freedom from**" (NCERT §2.5, pp. 26–27). **Positive liberty** is concerned with "**freedom to**", in response to "who governs me?" with "I govern myself"; its tradition runs through **Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Gandhi and Aurobindo** (NCERT §2.5, p. 27). It requires enabling material, political and social conditions — freedom from poverty and unemployment, opportunity to participate in decision-making, access to education. Positive liberty recognises that one can be free "only in society (not outside it)"; negative and positive liberty "generally go together and support each other" but "it can happen that tyrants justify their rule by invoking arguments of positive liberty" (NCERT §2.5, p. 28). The sub-section on **Freedom of Expression** (pp. 28–30) cites Voltaire ("I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to death your right to say it") and lists controversial works that were protested or banned — Deepa Mehta's film on Varanasi widows, Aubrey Menon's **Ramayana Retold**, Salman Rushdie's **The Satanic Verses**, **The Last Temptation of Christ**, **Me Nathuram Boltey**. "Banning is an easy solution for the short term ... but is very harmful for the long-term prospects of freedom" because "once one begins to ban then one develops a habit of banning" (NCERT p. 28). **Mill's four arguments** for freedom of expression: (i) no idea is completely false — banning

loses its element of truth; (ii) truth emerges only through conflict of opposing views; (iii) such conflict keeps truth from becoming an unthinking cliché; (iv) we cannot be sure today's truth is actually true — suppressed ideas have later turned out to be correct (NCERT Box "Freedom of Expression", p. 29). Freedom embodies the capacity to make choices, and with choice comes responsibility — which is why children are placed in the care of parents and why education and cultivation of judgement are as crucial as limiting state authority (NCERT closing paragraph, p. 30).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Freedom	Absence of external constraints and the expansion of the ability of people to express themselves and develop their potential.	19–20
Free society	One that enables all its members to develop their potential with the minimum of social constraints.	20
Swaraj	<b>Swa</b> (Self) + <b>Raj</b> (Rule); both rule of the self and rule over self; liberation in redeeming self-respect, self-responsibility and capacities for self-realisation.	20
Tilak's slogan	"Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it."	20
Hind Swaraj (1909)	Gandhi's work in which Swaraj is defined as "when we learn to rule ourselves."	20
Long Walk to Freedom	Mandela's autobiography on the anti-apartheid struggle.	18
Freedom from Fear	Aung San Suu Kyi's book of essays.	19
Suu Kyi's formulation	"Real freedom is freedom from fear and unless you can live free from fear you cannot live a dignified human life."	19
All-round freedom (Bose)	Freedom for the individual + society + rich + poor + men + women; political emancipation + equal distribution of wealth + abolition of caste barriers + destruction of communalism.	22
Liberalism	Political ideology centred on tolerance, the individual, priority of liberty over equality, suspicion of political authority; modern form accepts welfare state.	23
Harm Principle (Mill)	Power may be rightfully exercised over a member of a civilised community, against his will, only to prevent harm to others.	24
Self-regarding actions	Actions whose consequences are only for the actor — state has no business interfering.	24
Other-regarding actions	Actions whose consequences affect others — case for external interference if harm is serious.	24
Serious harm	The threshold above which legal restraint (not just social disapproval) is justified.	24–25

Term	Definition	Page
Social disapproval	Mill's recommended response to minor harm (e.g., loud music in an apartment).	24–25
Reasonable restrictions	Indian constitutional term for justifiable constraints — defensible by reason, not excessive, not out of proportion.	26
Negative liberty	Defends an inviolable minimum area of non-interference; "freedom from"; "over what area am I the master?"	26–27
Minimum area of non-interference	The sacred zone in which whatever the individual does is not to be interfered with.	26–27
Positive liberty	"Freedom to"; answers "who governs me?" with "I govern myself"; requires enabling material/political/social conditions.	27
Tradition of positive liberty	Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Gandhi, Aurobindo.	27
Mill's On Liberty	The text in which the harm principle and the four defences of free expression are advanced.	24, 29
Voltaire's defence	"I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to death your right to say it."	28
Banned/protested works listed	Deepa Mehta's <i>Water</i> (Varanasi widows); Aubrey Menon's <i>Ramayana Retold</i> ; Rushdie's <i>Satanic Verses</i> ; <i>Last Temptation of Christ</i> ; Me Nathuram Boltey.	28
Habit of banning	The long-term danger that NCERT warns against because banning becomes easy once started.	28
Freedom and responsibility	Closing claim: freedom embodies the capacity to make choices, and with choice comes responsibility.	30

## 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

Several visual and pedagogical devices anchor the content.

**(a) Opening photographs (p. 17)** — Nelson Mandela and Aung San Suu Kyi side by side, captioned with credits on p. 30 ([www.africawithin.com](http://www.africawithin.com) for Mandela; [www.ibiblio.org](http://www.ibiblio.org) for Suu Kyi). They anchor the entire chapter's case-study method.

**(b) Box: "Swaraj" (p. 20)** — A side-column box giving the etymology (Swa + Raj), Tilak's slogan, Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* (1909), and the contrast between Swaraj as mere freedom and Swaraj as liberation involving self-respect/self-responsibility/self-realisation.

**(c) Box: "Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose on Freedom" (p. 22)** — Extract from his Presidential Address to the Students' Conference at Lahore on **19 October 1929**, defining "all-round freedom" as political emancipation **plus** equal distribution of wealth **plus** abolition of caste barriers **plus** destruction of communalism.

**(d) Box: "Liberalism" (p. 23)** — Five-feature definition: tolerance, individual-centric, priority to liberty over equality, suspicion of authority, historical free-market preference now reconciled with welfare state.

**(e) "Let's Think — The Issue of Dress Code" (p. 25)** — Four scenarios designed to test application of the harm principle: Mao suits in China, the fatwa on Sania Mirza's dress, ICC's white-clothing rule for Tests, school uniforms. Questions: Is the restriction always justified or only sometimes? Who has authority to impose it? Is the imposition excessive? What are the consequences?

**(f) Box: "Freedom of Expression" (p. 29)** — Mill's four reasons in *On Liberty*: (i) no idea is completely false; (ii) truth emerges through conflict of opposing views; (iii) conflict keeps truth from becoming an unthinking cliché; (iv) we cannot be sure today's truth is actually true — suppressed ideas have later been vindicated.

**Process map:** Mandela/Suu Kyi as case studies (§2.1) → freedom = absence of constraint + expansion of potential (§2.2) → Swaraj as indigenous analogue (§2.2 Box) → sources of constraint: political, social inequality, economic inequality (§2.2) → why constraints are nevertheless needed (§2.3) → Mill's harm principle: self-regarding vs other-regarding actions, serious vs minor harm (§2.4) → "reasonable restrictions" in Indian constitutional language (§2.4) → negative liberty (freedom from / over what area am I the master) vs positive liberty (freedom to / who governs me) (§2.5) → freedom of expression as test case + Mill's four defences (§2.5) → closing: freedom = choice + responsibility (p. 30).

## 2.5 Key Articles / Treaties / Events

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Apartheid (South Africa)	Segregationist regime against which Mandela led the freedom struggle	p. 18
Long Walk to Freedom	Mandela's autobiography on apartheid resistance	p. 18
Military rule and house arrest in Myanmar	Setting of Aung San Suu Kyi's <i>Freedom from Fear</i>	p. 19
Hind Swaraj	Gandhi, 1909 — defined Swaraj as "rule over the self"	p. 20
Tilak's slogan	"Swaraj is my birth right and I shall have it"	p. 20
Netaji Bose's Lahore Address	19 October 1929 — Students' Conference; defined "all-round freedom"	p. 22
Mill's <i>On Liberty</i>	19th-century Britain — source of harm principle and four defences of free expression	pp. 24, 29
Voltaire's defence of speech	"I disapprove of what you say but I will defend to death your right to say it"	p. 28

Reference	Source / Subject	NCERT cite
Deepa Mehta's film on Varanasi widows	Banned/protected in India	p. 28
Ramayana Retold (Aubrey Menon)	Banned after protest	p. 28
The Satanic Verses (Salman Rushdie)	Banned after protest	p. 28
The Last Temptation of Christ	Banned after protest	p. 28
Me Nathuram Boltey (play)	Banned after protest	p. 28
Mao's China dress code	Mao suits imposed as expression of equality	p. 25
ICC rule (cricket Tests)	Cited as a contractual restriction on dress	p. 25
English Royal Household contract	Cited as a contractual constraint on freedom of expression	p. 29
Indian Constitution — "reasonable restrictions"	The constitutional doctrine governing limits on fundamental freedoms (Art. 19(2)–(6) framework, identified by NCERT only by the phrase "reasonable restrictions")	p. 26

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- Swaraj is not merely freedom** — it is liberation including self-respect, self-responsibility and self-realisation (p. 20). Distractors will reduce it to political independence.
- Negative ↔ Positive inversion** — Negative liberty = "freedom from" / "over what area am I the master?"; Positive liberty = "freedom to" / "who governs me?" (pp. 26–27). NTA frequently swaps these.
- Harm Principle applies only to serious harm** — minor harm (loud music) deserves only social disapproval, not legal punishment (pp. 24–25).
- "Reasonable restrictions" is the exact constitutional phrase** — not "necessary", "rational" or "proportionate" restrictions (p. 26).
- Mill's tradition vs Positive-liberty tradition** — Mill (On Liberty, harm principle, free expression) is in the negative-liberty school; positive liberty traces to **Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Gandhi and Aurobindo** (p. 27). Don't add Mill to the positive-liberty list.
- Hind Swaraj was written in 1909**, not in 1919 or during the Quit India phase (p. 20). Date traps appear regularly.

7. **Tilak's exact slogan** is "Swaraj is my birth right **and I shall have it**" — not "and I will achieve it" or "and we shall have it" (p. 20).
8. **Mandela's term of imprisonment** is **27 years** (p. 18) — distractors offer 25 or 30.
9. **Bose's "all-round freedom" speech** was delivered at the **Lahore Students' Conference on 19 October 1929** (p. 22) — not at the 1929 Lahore Congress Session.
10. **Suu Kyi's book** is Freedom from Fear, not Freedom from the Junta or Freedom in Myanmar (p. 19); her quote is "real freedom is freedom from fear."
11. **Liberalism in its modern form accepts welfare-state measures** to reduce social and economic inequality (p. 23) — trap options will pretend liberalism is permanently committed to the unregulated free market.
12. **Tyrants can misuse positive-liberty arguments** to justify their rule (p. 28) — this is a nuance NCERT explicitly flags; do not assume positive and negative liberty are always in conflict (they "generally go together and support each other").

## Practice MCQs

## PYQ Alignment

In CUET 2023–25 Political Science papers, the Class XI Political Theory chapter on Freedom has reliably contributed 5–7 MCQs per year, with consistent favourites on Mill's harm principle, the negative-versus-positive liberty distinction, **Swaraj** (Tilak + Gandhi/Hind Swaraj 1909), and the "reasonable restrictions" terminology. Expect at least one statement-based or assertion-reason item built around Mill, plus a match-the-following linking Mandela, Suu Kyi, Gandhi and Mill to their respective works. For full chapter-wise PYQ mapping see </pyq/political-science>.