Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had cautioned that employing civil disobedience within a constitutional democracy equates to endorsing 'anarchy'. How should modern democracies navigate the ethical dilemmas posed by civil disobedience movements that aim to promote social justice against policies that may raise genuine concerns?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2026	GS - IV	Ethics & Morality

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Civil disobedience, constitutional democracy, social justice, rule of law, dissent, non-violence, constitutional remedies, public interest

Model Answer

Introduction

Civil disobedience creates an ethical tension between respect for law and resistance to perceived injustice. Democracy must accommodate dissent without normalising lawlessness.

1. Ethical Justification

Civil disobedience may be morally defensible when laws or policies seriously violate justice, equality or fundamental rights and ordinary institutional channels appear inadequate. Non-violence and public accountability strengthen its ethical legitimacy.

2. Democratic Limits

The movement should not undermine constitutional institutions, intimidate citizens or cause disproportionate harm. Violence, coercion and destruction of public property weaken the moral basis of dissent.

3. State Responsibility

Governments should distinguish peaceful dissent from violent threats. Dialogue, consultation, judicial review, legislative debate and grievance mechanisms should be preferred before coercive measures.

4. Balanced Approach

Citizens must respect constitutional procedures, while governments must remain responsive to legitimate grievances.

Conclusion

Modern democracy should neither suppress dissent nor romanticise law-breaking. Ethical civil disobedience should remain peaceful, proportionate and oriented towards constitutional justice.

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