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HOW DO DIFFERENT POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES DEFINE FREEDOM

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Abstract:

Indian political thought presents a rich and multifaceted understanding of freedom, rooted in both ancient philosophical traditions and modern political movements. Unlike the Western liberal notion of freedom as individual autonomy and absence of external constraints, Indian conceptions often integrate spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. Classical texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and Arthashastra emphasize svadharma (one's own duty) and self-mastery, highlighting inner freedom through discipline and ethical action. Modern thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, and Rabindranath Tagore further developed these ideas, connecting freedom with self-realization, social justice, and emancipation from colonial and caste oppression. Gandhi viewed swaraj (self-rule) as both political independence and personal ethical sovereignty, while Ambedkar stressed freedom as equality and dignity in a democratic society. Thus, Indian political thought defines freedom not merely as liberation from external domination but as a holistic process of personal, social, and national transformation.

Keywords: *Indian political thought, freedom, swaraj, svadharma, self-rule, Gandhi, Ambedkar, Tagore, spiritual freedom, social justice, emancipation, colonialism, caste, self-realization, democracy.*

Introduction to Freedom:

In India, freedom holds deep significance, shaped by its long struggle for independence and its commitment to democracy. It represents not only the end of colonial rule in 1947 but also the protection of fundamental rights, such as free speech, religious choice, and equality, as guaranteed by the Constitution. Beyond political liberty, freedom in India reflects the ability of people to express their beliefs and pursue their aspirations in a diverse and multicultural society. However, it also comes with responsibilities, as true freedom requires maintaining harmony, justice, and inclusivity. While India has upheld democratic values, challenges like social inequality, restrictions on expression, and economic differences continue to shape the evolving understanding of freedom in the

country.

Freedom in India is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond mere political independence. It embodies the rights and liberties granted to individuals, ensuring they can express their thoughts, practice their faith, and pursue their aspirations without fear. Rooted in the country's rich history of resistance against colonial rule, freedom is not just a privilege but a responsibility. The Indian Constitution upholds this ideal by providing fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, religion, and equality before the law. However, true freedom is realized when social justice, economic equality, and individual dignity are safeguarded for all citizens. While India has made significant progress in strengthening democratic values, challenges such as poverty, discrimination, and limitations on expression continue to shape the evolving definition of freedom. In a diverse nation like India, freedom is meaningful when it fosters unity, respects differences, and promotes the collective well-being of society.

Different ideologies of Indians in defining Freedom:

- **Raja Ram Mohan Roy:**

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, often regarded as the father of the Indian Renaissance, was a strong advocate of freedom in various spheres of life, including social, religious, and intellectual domains. He believed that true freedom lay in the abolition of oppressive traditions and the promotion of rational thinking, education, and individual rights. He fought against social evils like Sati, child marriage, and caste-based discrimination, emphasizing the need for progressive reforms. Roy also championed freedom of speech and expression, recognizing it as essential for a just and enlightened society. His efforts in promoting press freedom and advocating for modern education played a crucial role in shaping India's intellectual and social awakening. His vision of freedom was not just political but deeply rooted in human dignity, equality, and the upliftment of society through knowledge and reform.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a visionary reformer who championed freedom in various aspects of society, including social, religious, and intellectual domains. He played a crucial role in abolishing the oppressive practice of Sati, advocating for women's rights, and promoting equality. His efforts in establishing the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 were aimed at fostering religious freedom, challenging superstitions, and promoting rational thinking. A firm believer in freedom of expression, he actively fought for press rights and founded newspapers like *Sambad Kaumudi* and *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* to spread progressive ideas. Roy also emphasized the importance of modern education, advocating for subjects like science and English to help Indians break free from outdated traditions. Additionally, he demanded political and judicial reforms to ensure fairness and justice for all. His vision of freedom extended beyond political liberty, focusing on social upliftment, knowledge, and human dignity. Through his relentless efforts, he laid the foundation for a modern and progressive India, inspiring

future generations in their quest for liberty and justice.

- **Rabindranath Tagore:**

Rabindranath Tagore had a profound and holistic vision of freedom, which extended beyond political independence to encompass intellectual, social, and spiritual liberation. He believed that true freedom lay in the unrestricted pursuit of knowledge, self-expression, and the breaking of societal barriers that hinder human progress. In his famous poem "*Where the Mind is Without Fear*," he envisioned a world where individuals could think freely, where knowledge was not limited by narrow domestic walls, and where people lived with dignity and self-respect. Tagore was also a strong advocate for education, emphasizing that true freedom could be achieved only through enlightenment and creativity. His philosophy rejected rigid nationalism and instead embraced universalism, believing that freedom should unite humanity rather than divide it. Through his literary works, educational initiatives like Visva-Bharati University, and advocacy for social reforms, Tagore continuously emphasized the importance of inner freedom, cultural openness, and human dignity, making his ideas relevant even today.

Rabindranath Tagore's works on freedom encompassed political, intellectual, social, and spiritual dimensions, advocating for a world free from fear, ignorance, and rigid boundaries. His iconic poem "*Where the Mind is Without Fear*," included in *Gitanjali*, reflects his vision of an enlightened society driven by knowledge and truth. In novels like *Gora* and *Ghare-Baire*, he challenged religious orthodoxy, caste restrictions, and aggressive nationalism, promoting a more inclusive and rational approach to freedom. Tagore's contributions extended beyond literature, as seen in his patriotic songs like *Jana Gana Mana* and *Amar Sonar Bangla*, which became national anthems of India and Bangladesh, respectively. He also championed educational freedom by founding Visva-Bharati University in 1921, emphasizing cross-cultural learning and intellectual independence. Many of his works, such as *Chokher Bali*, addressed women's struggles and the need for gender equality. Through his essays and letters, Tagore criticized both British colonial rule and extreme nationalism, advocating for universal humanism. His writings and initiatives continue to inspire movements for freedom, justice, and creativity worldwide.

- **Mahatma Gandhi:**

Mahatma Gandhi played a pivotal role in India's struggle for freedom, advocating for a nonviolent and inclusive approach to independence. His vision of freedom extended beyond political liberation from British rule; it encompassed social, economic, and moral self-reliance. Through movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement, and Quit India Movement, Gandhi mobilized millions in a peaceful fight against colonial oppression. He emphasized *Swaraj* (self-rule), which not only meant self-governance but also individual self-discipline, empowerment of villages, and economic self-sufficiency through initiatives like the

promotion of Khadi. Gandhi also fought for the abolition of untouchability and worked towards communal harmony, believing that true freedom could only be achieved when all sections of society were treated equally. His ideals of truth, nonviolence, and self-reliance laid the foundation for India's independence in 1947 and continue to inspire movements for justice and human rights across the world.

Mahatma Gandhi's works on Indian freedom were deeply rooted in nonviolence, truth, and self-reliance, shaping the country's independence movement. His book *Hind Swaraj* (1909) outlined his vision of self-rule, emphasizing moral, social, and economic independence rather than just political freedom. He led key movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), urging Indians to boycott British goods and institutions, and the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), marked by the historic Dandi March against the salt tax. The Quit India Movement (1942) was his final major call for complete independence, mobilizing the masses against British rule. Gandhi also worked extensively for social freedom, fighting against untouchability through the Harijan Movement and advocating for Hindu-Muslim unity to prevent communal divisions. His promotion of Khadi and rural self-sufficiency aimed at economic independence from British exploitation. Through his writings, speeches, and nonviolent protests, Gandhi not only led India to independence in 1947 but also left a lasting legacy of resistance based on truth and peace.

- **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar viewed freedom as a comprehensive ideal encompassing political, social, and economic equality. He believed that true freedom could not be achieved without dismantling caste discrimination and ensuring dignity for all individuals. For him, political independence was meaningless without social and economic justice. Ambedkar strongly advocated for the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities, emphasizing the need for education, self-respect, and equal opportunities. He played a key role in drafting the Indian Constitution, ensuring fundamental rights and legal protections for every citizen. His vision of freedom extended to gender equality, labor rights, and religious liberty, as reflected in his efforts to abolish untouchability, support reservations for disadvantaged groups, and promote Buddhism as a path to social emancipation. Through his writings, legal work, and activism, Ambedkar laid the foundation for an inclusive democracy where freedom meant equality, dignity, and justice for all.

His Works on Freedom:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's works were instrumental in shaping India's path toward true freedom, emphasizing social justice and equality. His book *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) strongly criticized the caste system and called for its complete eradication, arguing that social hierarchy was the greatest obstacle to real freedom. In *The Problem of the Rupee* (1923), he addressed economic freedom, highlighting the need for financial stability and fair economic policies. As the chief architect of the

Indian Constitution, he ensured that fundamental rights, democracy, and equality were at its core, providing a strong legal framework for political freedom. His role in advocating for the Hindu Code Bill sought to grant women equal rights in inheritance and marriage, furthering gender justice. Additionally, his decision to embrace Buddhism in 1956, along with millions of followers, was a declaration of religious and personal freedom, rejecting caste-based oppression. Through his scholarly works, legal reforms, and activism, Ambedkar redefined freedom as a struggle for justice, equality, and dignity for all sections of society.

What does freedom means to Indians in 21st C.E.:

In the 20th century, freedom for Indians primarily meant liberation from British colonial rule, but it also carried deeper social, economic, and political implications. The struggle for independence, led by leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Jawaharlal Nehru, was not just about self-governance but also about securing rights, dignity, and equality for all citizens. Movements like Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India reflected the collective aspiration for a free nation where people could determine their own future. Beyond political independence, freedom also signified the end of social injustices such as untouchability, caste discrimination, and gender inequality, championed by reformers like B.R. Ambedkar and Sarojini Naidu. Economic self-reliance became a crucial part of this vision, as leaders promoted Swadeshi movements and self-sufficient industries to reduce dependence on foreign powers. By the mid-20th century, with India's independence in 1947, freedom evolved to include democratic rights, constitutional governance, and the pursuit of a just and equitable society, shaping the nation's identity for years to come.

- **The Indian National Congress:**

The Indian National Congress played a crucial role in defining and leading the freedom struggle against British colonial rule. Established in 1885, it initially sought constitutional reforms and greater Indian representation in governance but gradually evolved into the driving force behind India's independence movement. Under leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Subhas Chandra Bose, the Congress spearheaded major movements such as the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920), Civil Disobedience Movement (1930), and Quit India Movement (1942), mobilizing millions of Indians against British rule. The Congress also played a key role in shaping the idea of *Swaraj* (self-rule), advocating not just for political freedom but also for social and economic justice. It emphasized the importance of unity, secularism, and democracy, influencing the framing of independent India's Constitution. Despite internal differences over strategies, with some factions favoring nonviolence and others revolutionary methods, the Congress remained the central force in achieving India's independence in 1947 and in defining the nation's path toward democracy and self-governance.

INC Works:

The Indian National Congress played a central role in India's struggle for freedom through a combination of political reforms, mass movements, and negotiations with the British government. It gradually evolved into the primary force advocating for complete independence. In the early years, leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji and Gopal Krishna Gokhale emphasized economic and political rights, demanding greater Indian representation in governance. With Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, the Congress launched the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922), urging Indians to boycott British goods and institutions while promoting self-reliance. The Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-1934), highlighted by the Dandi March, intensified the demand for self-rule by encouraging peaceful defiance of colonial laws. The Quit India Movement (1942) became a defining moment, calling for an immediate end to British rule despite severe repression. Alongside protests, the Congress also engaged in negotiations, such as the Round Table Conferences and the Government of India Act, 1935, to shape India's constitutional future. As independence neared, the party formed the interim government in 1946 under Jawaharlal Nehru, laying the foundation for sovereign governance. Through decades of relentless struggle, peaceful resistance, and strategic diplomacy, the Congress emerged as the driving force behind India's independence in 1947.

- **The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP):**

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) views freedom as a blend of national sovereignty, cultural identity, and individual rights, rooted in the principles of democracy and self-reliance. The party emphasizes political freedom through strong governance, economic freedom through self-sufficiency (*Atmanirbhar Bharat*), and social freedom by promoting equal opportunities while preserving India's cultural heritage. The BJP believes in a robust national security framework to safeguard the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also stresses the importance of economic reforms, entrepreneurship, and reducing bureaucratic constraints to enhance individual and business freedoms. Additionally, the party upholds freedom of religion while advocating for a Uniform Civil Code to ensure equality in personal laws. BJP's vision of freedom extends to digital and technological advancements, aiming for self-reliance in defense, infrastructure, and innovation. Overall, its perspective on freedom combines nationalism, governance reforms, economic growth, and cultural pride to shape a strong and self-sufficient India.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has undertaken several initiatives to promote freedom for Indians in various aspects, including political, economic, social, and digital spheres. Through its governance, the party has focused on strengthening national security, empowering citizens economically, and ensuring individual rights while preserving cultural identity.

1. **Political and National Freedom** – The BJP has emphasized national sovereignty and security through measures such as the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, integrating Jammu

and Kashmir more closely with India and ensuring equal constitutional rights for its residents. It has also taken steps to promote a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to ensure equal personal laws for all citizens, reinforcing individual freedom and justice.

2. **Economic Freedom and Self-Reliance** – The *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (Self-Reliant India) initiative promotes economic independence by encouraging domestic industries, reducing dependency on imports, and supporting entrepreneurship. Policies like *Make in India* and *Startup India* provide business-friendly reforms and opportunities for financial freedom. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) reform simplified the tax system, reducing bureaucratic constraints and increasing ease of doing business.
3. **Social and Religious Freedom** – The BJP has promoted women's empowerment through initiatives like the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* scheme, which focuses on education and gender equality. It has also worked towards criminalizing practices like triple talaq, ensuring legal protection and freedom for Muslim women. Additionally, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was introduced to provide refuge and citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighboring countries, promoting religious freedom.
4. **Digital and Technological Freedom** – Under BJP leadership, initiatives like *Digital India* have expanded internet access, e-governance, and digital literacy, empowering citizens with more access to information and services. Programs like *Ayushman Bharat* and the Jan Dhan Yojana have enabled financial and healthcare inclusion, ensuring freedom from economic and medical hardships.
5. **Freedom through Infrastructure and Defense** – The party has focused on strengthening defense capabilities and border security while promoting infrastructure projects such as improved roadways, railways, and smart cities, ensuring freedom of movement and better opportunities for all citizens.

Religious freedom or Secularism in India:

Secularism in the Indian context represents a unique form of freedom, ensuring that individuals have the right to practice, profess, and propagate their religion without state interference or favoritism. Unlike the Western concept of secularism, which emphasizes a strict separation of religion and state, Indian secularism allows the state to engage with all religions while maintaining neutrality and ensuring equal treatment. This framework grants freedom from religious domination, both from the state and within communities, empowering individuals to choose or even reject religious beliefs without coercion.

The Indian Constitution, through provisions like Articles 25-28, guarantees religious freedom while also preventing the state from imposing or endorsing any particular faith. Secularism as freedom ensures that minority communities can preserve their cultural and religious identities

without discrimination, fostering social harmony in a diverse nation. It also protects individuals from regressive religious practices by allowing legal interventions, such as in cases like the abolition of untouchability and the criminalization of triple talaq. However, challenges such as political mobilization based on religious identities and debates around issues like the Uniform Civil Code continue to test the secular fabric of India. Despite these complexities, secularism remains essential to India's democratic ethos, ensuring that freedom of belief, expression, and equality coexist in a pluralistic society.

- **The rise of Hindutva in the contemporary period:**

The rise of Hindutva in the contemporary period has been marked by its increasing influence in Indian politics, society, and cultural identity. Hindutva, a term popularized by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, emphasizes Hindu cultural nationalism and has been championed by organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In recent decades, its prominence has grown due to a combination of political mobilization, socio-cultural movements, and changing public sentiment. The ideology has played a key role in shaping policies related to national identity, religious affairs, and governance, including issues like the abrogation of Article 370, the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and debates around the Uniform Civil Code. Supporters argue that Hindutva strengthens India's cultural heritage and unity, while critics express concerns over its impact on secularism and religious pluralism. The digital era has further amplified its reach through social media, shaping political discourse and influencing public opinion. As India continues to evolve, Hindutva remains a central force in contemporary socio-political debates, reflecting the complexities of identity, tradition, and governance in the modern era.

- **The Ram Janmabhoomi issue:**

The Ram Janmabhoomi issue has been one of the most significant and contentious religious and political debates in India, directly impacting the country's secular fabric. The dispute revolves around the belief that the Babri Masjid, built in the 16th century, stood on the birthplace of Lord Ram in Ayodhya. The issue gained prominence in the late 20th century, especially with the rise of the Hindutva movement. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 led to communal tensions and legal battles that lasted for decades. In 2019, the Supreme Court of India ruled in favor of the construction of a Ram Temple at the site while allocating an alternative land for the mosque, attempting to balance religious sentiments and legal justice.

The relevance of this issue to secularism in India lies in its impact on the principle of religious coexistence. While the Indian Constitution upholds secularism, ensuring that the state remains neutral in religious matters, the Ram Janmabhoomi dispute has often been seen as a test of this principle. Supporters argue that the temple represents the restoration of cultural heritage, while critics view it as a challenge to India's secular framework, fearing that it sets a precedent for

religious majoritarianism. The resolution of the issue through the judicial process reflects an attempt to uphold both faith and constitutional values. However, its long-term implications on secularism continue to be debated, as India navigates the balance between religious identity and the commitment to an inclusive and pluralistic society.

The Ram Janmabhoomi temple issue has had a profound impact on Indian society, influencing politics, communal relations, and national identity. It has been a symbol of religious and cultural assertion, particularly for the Hindutva movement, while also being a source of controversy and communal tensions. The 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid led to widespread riots, deepening divisions between Hindu and Muslim communities and altering the nature of political discourse in India. Over the years, the issue has contributed to the rise of identity-based politics, with religious sentiments playing a significant role in electoral strategies.

The 2019 Supreme Court verdict, which allowed the construction of the Ram Temple while allocating separate land for a mosque, was seen as a legal resolution to the long-standing conflict. While many Hindus celebrated it as a historical and cultural victory, some sections of society viewed it as a shift towards religious majoritarianism, raising concerns about the future of secularism. On the other hand, the judgment and subsequent temple construction have also led to a sense of closure for many, reducing communal tensions compared to previous decades. The issue has further influenced social narratives, with increased emphasis on cultural nationalism and historical reclamation. As Indian society continues to evolve, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement remains a key factor in shaping discussions on religion, politics, and national identity.

In addition, **media representation and public narratives** have contributed to shaping perceptions about secularism. A shift towards sensationalism and biased portrayals of religious communities in news and entertainment has further fueled stereotypes and division. The challenge lies in maintaining a responsible and balanced media discourse that upholds secular values while allowing freedom of expression.

Conclusion:

The concept of freedom in Indian political thought has evolved through centuries, shaped by philosophical traditions, colonial struggles, and post-independence governance. Indian thinkers, from ancient times to modern leaders, have emphasized freedom as both a collective and individual pursuit, balancing personal liberties with social responsibilities. During the nationalist movement, figures like Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, and others redefined freedom beyond mere political independence, advocating for economic self-reliance, social justice, and democratic governance. Post-independence, Indian political thought has continued to evolve, addressing challenges such as secularism, economic equity, and individual rights within a diverse and pluralistic society. In contemporary discourse, freedom in India is continuously debated in the

context of governance, nationalism, and socio-political rights. While democratic institutions provide a framework for individual and collective freedoms, ongoing debates around secularism, economic policies, and civil liberties highlight the dynamic nature of this concept. The Indian perspective on freedom remains unique, integrating historical wisdom with modern democratic principles, ensuring that the idea of liberty is not only about rights but also about social harmony and national progress. Despite the challenges, secularism continues to be a defining pillar of India's democracy. Its survival depends on strengthening constitutional safeguards, promoting unbiased governance, fostering interfaith dialogue, and ensuring that state policies remain inclusive and neutral. A pluralistic society like India requires a continuous commitment to secular principles to maintain harmony, protect individual freedoms, and uphold the rich diversity that defines the nation.

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