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When the Young Took Up Arms: On the Ethics of Revolutionary Violence

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 **The Hindu**

22 June 2026

GS1

GS4

 Source: ujyari.com — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped

INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Can political violence against an unjust regime ever be ethically justified, or does the means corrupt the end?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[The Hindu](#)
 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

June 22, 2026 marks the 129th anniversary of the Chapekar brothers' assassination of W.C. Rand, the British plague commissioner in Pune, in 1897. The episode, born of resentment at coercive plague-control measures, sits at the crossroads of history and ethics, and invites a question that recurs across freedom struggles: can political violence against an unjust order ever be morally justified?

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

The Chapekar brothers' act, against an official associated with coercive colonial plague measures, poses a hard ethical question. Read through consequentialist, deontological and virtue lenses, it yields no easy verdict. The decisive distinctions are intent, target and proportionality, which separate justified resistance from terror. History asks us to reason through the means-end tension, not to romanticise or condemn blindly.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

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ELEMENT	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT MATTERS
Chapekar act 1897	Assassination of plague commissioner Rand	Early instance of revolutionary violence
Consequentialism	Judging acts by their outcomes	Weighs liberation against repression
Deontology	Judging acts by rules and duties	Asks if killing is ever a permissible means
Proportionality	Means matched to ends and targets	Separates resistance from terror

THE ANALYSIS: REASONING THROUGH THE ACT

- ❶ **The historical context matters.** The killing followed widely resented, coercive plague-control measures, framing it as a response to perceived injustice.
- ❷ **Consequences cut both ways.** It dramatised colonial cruelty and stirred resolve, but also invited harsh repression and loss of life.
- ❸ **Rules versus outcomes.** A deontological ethic resists justifying killing by results; a consequentialist weighs the net effect.
- ❹ **Intent and target are decisive.** Targeting an official enforcing oppression differs morally from indiscriminate violence against civilians.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

Event: Chapekar brothers killed W.C. Rand, plague commissioner, Pune, June 22, 1897. **Context:** Coercive measures during the bubonic plague epidemic. **Stream:** Early revolutionary nationalism, alongside Moderate and later Gandhian methods. **Ethical frames:** Consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics. **Test:** Intent, target and proportionality distinguish resistance from terror.

THE DEBATE

Argument for: Against a brutal and unaccountable colonial regime, violence aimed at oppressive officials can be read as a justified, if tragic, form of resistance.

Argument against: A rule-based or pacifist ethic holds that political killing is never justified, however grave the injustice, because the means corrupt the end.

Balanced verdict: The episode resists a single verdict. Context, intent and proportionality must all be weighed, and the enduring value is in the ethical reasoning, not in romanticising or condemning the act wholesale.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

When judging a morally charged act, apply more than one ethical lens before concluding. Ask what the outcomes were, what duties were honoured or broken, and what the actor's intent and character revealed. A mature judgment holds the tension between competing frameworks rather than collapsing into easy praise or blame.

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Colonial injustice -> revolutionary act -> ethical scrutiny by intent, target, proportionality -> reasoned, context-aware judgment

THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 Teach such episodes as living ethical cases, not settled heroism or guilt.
- 2 Equip students to apply consequentialist, deontological and virtue lenses together.
- 3 Preserve the historical context of colonial injustice that shaped these acts.
- 4 Use the intent-target-proportionality test to distinguish resistance from terror.
- 5 Connect the reasoning to contemporary debates on protest, **dissent** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/dissent/>) and the limits of force.

THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*Ethics of means and ends; the moral evaluation of resistance to injustice. **Lift line:** "It teaches the enduring tension between resisting injustice and the moral limits on the means used to resist it." **Prelims hooks:** Chapekar brothers, W.C. Rand, 1897 Pune plague, revolutionary nationalism. **Ethics/Interview angle:** Whether violent resistance to an unjust regime can be ethically justified. **PYQ linkage:** UPSC has asked on revolutionary movements in the freedom struggle and on ethics of means and ends. **Connects to:** Revolutionary nationalism, Gandhian non-violence, applied ethics, civil disobedience.*

Sources: *The Hindu* (<https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in/>)

Source: ~~When the Young Took Up Arms: On the Ethics of Revolutionary Violence~~ [Ujyari.com](#) | Free UPSC & Ujyari Current Affairs · ujyari.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS
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● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

The Chapekar brothers' act forces a hard ethical question, and the answer requires weighing the injustice resisted against the moral cost of violence through competing ethical frameworks.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- A consequentialist lens weighs outcomes and the provocation of colonial repression.
- A deontological lens asks whether killing can ever be a permissible means.
- The line between justified resistance and terror turns on intent, target and proportionality.

⚠ **COUNTER**

A strict pacifist or rule-based view holds that political killing is never justified, however grave the injustice.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Honour the courage and context of revolutionaries while teaching students to reason through the ethics rather than romanticise or condemn uncritically.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

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QUESTION

'The history of India's freedom struggle includes both non-violent and revolutionary streams. Critically examine the ethics of revolutionary violence against colonial rule using deontological and consequentialist lenses. (250 words)'

INTRODUCTION

The 129th anniversary of the Chapekar brothers' assassination of W.C. Rand in 1897, amid plague-control excesses in Pune, revisits one of the freedom struggle's hardest questions: can violence against an unjust colonial order be morally justified?

BODY

The act sits within a wider revolutionary stream that ran alongside constitutional and, later, non-violent methods. Ethically it can be read through competing lenses.

A consequentialist asks whether the act reduced suffering or advanced freedom; it may have dramatised colonial cruelty and inspired resolve, but it also invited harsh repression and the loss of life on all sides. A deontological view asks whether killing can ever be a permissible means regardless of consequences, and a rule-based ethic would say no.

A virtue-ethics reading looks at the courage, sacrifice and motive of young men resisting humiliation, while still asking whether courage in a wrong method is admirable. The decisive moral distinctions are intent, target and proportionality.

Resistance aimed at an official enforcing oppressive measures differs morally from indiscriminate violence against civilians, which is terror. The history therefore cannot be flattened into simple heroism or simple condemnation.

It must be understood in its context of colonial injustice, while the ethical reasoning, the means-end relationship, the limits of justified force, remains permanently relevant.

CONCLUSION

The Chapekar episode is best engaged not as settled glory or guilt but as a living ethical case. It teaches the enduring tension between resisting injustice and the moral limits on the means used to resist it.


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