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Article 47 of the Constitution

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A hungry or sick people cannot enjoy freedom for long. Article 47 says so in plain terms. It names three goals: better food, a better standard of living and better public health. It also asks the State to work toward ending the use of harmful drinks and drugs. It is a directive, not a right. Yet courts have turned it into real protection.

> **Duty** Raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living, and improve public health.
> **Wording** These are “among its primary duties”.
> **Prohibition** Endeavour to bring about prohibition of intoxicating drinks and harmful drugs, except for medicinal purposes.
> **Status** Directive Principle, Part IV, not enforceable.

Nutrition: the food a person needs to grow and stay healthy.

Public health: the health of the whole community, such as clean water and disease control.

Prohibition: a legal ban on making, selling or drinking alcohol.

1 What does Article 47 direct the State to do?

1.1 What are the three goals?

The first goal is **nutrition**. People must get enough good food. The second is the **standard of living**. This means income, housing and basic comforts. The third is **public health**. This means clean water, sanitation and disease control. The State must treat all three as central tasks.

1.2 Is it enforceable?

No. Like every Directive Principle, Article 47 falls under Article 37. A court cannot order the State to obey it. But the State has a duty to apply it when it makes laws and policy.

- Three goals: nutrition, living standard, public health.
- One extra push: prohibition of harmful drinks and drugs.
- Part IV, so not enforceable in court.
- The State must still use it in lawmaking.

Remember This: Article 47 has three goals and one push: nutrition, living standard, public health, and prohibition of harmful drinks and drugs.

2 Why are these called primary duties?

2.1 What is special about “primary duties”?

Most Directive Principles use soft words like “endeavour” or “strive”. Article 47 begins with firmer words. The State shall regard these goals as **among its primary duties**. Exams like to test this close reading of the text.

2.2 Do firmer words make it enforceable?

No. The strong wording shows importance. It does not change the legal status. The article stays a Directive Principle. Note also that the word “endeavour” does appear later in the same article, in the prohibition part.

- “Primary duties” signals priority.
- Legal status is unchanged: still non-justiciable.
- “Endeavour” is used for the prohibition goal.

> **Quick check 1.** Article 47 is a Fundamental Right because it uses the words ‘primary duties’. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

3 What does Article 47 say about prohibition?

3.1 Does it ban alcohol across India?

No. Article 47 only asks the State to **endeavour** to bring about prohibition. Medicinal use is excepted. The article itself does not ban anything. States make their own liquor laws.

3.2 Which States have used it?

Gujarat has had prohibition since its creation in 1960. Bihar imposed a ban in April 2016. Both cite Article 47 for their policy. Not every State follows this path. Many earn large excise revenue from liquor.

The Supreme Court backed the State's power in *Khoday Distilleries v. State of Karnataka* (1995). It held that there is **no fundamental right to trade in liquor**. So a State can regulate or even ban it.

- Gujarat: prohibition since 1960.
- Bihar: blanket ban from April 2016.
- Khoday 1995: no fundamental right to trade in liquor.
- Liquor is a State subject. Public health is also a State subject.

Remember This: Article 47 asks the State to work toward prohibition. It does not impose one. States decide.

4 How did Article 47 grow into a right to health?

4.1 How did a directive turn into a right?

Courts read Article 47 together with Article 21. In *Vincent Panikurlangara v. Union of India* (1987), the Supreme Court dealt with unsafe drugs. It stressed the State's duty under Article 47 to improve public health. Through Article 21, this helped build a **right to health**.

4.2 What did the 1996 case add?

In *Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samity v. State of West Bengal* (1996), a man with severe head injuries was turned away by several government hospitals in Calcutta. The Court held that failing to give timely medical treatment violates the **right to life under Article 21**. It added that lack of money cannot excuse the State's duty.



A Primary Health Centre in Addakal, Telangana. Such centres are the first level of public care. Photo: Kavali Chandrakanth KCK, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

- 1987 Vincent: Article 47 stressed, health linked to Article 21.
- 1996 Paschim Banga: timely emergency treatment is part of Article 21.
- Result: an enforceable right to health, built on a directive.

Explain It Back: In your own words, say why Article 47 cannot be enforced directly. Then say how courts still used it to protect health.

> **Quick check 2.** The Supreme Court has held that failure to give timely emergency treatment in a government hospital can violate Article 21. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

5 Who runs health and liquor policy?

5.1 Whose job is health?

Public health and sanitation are on the **State List** of the Seventh Schedule. So States run most hospitals and health centres. The Union helps through national missions and funds. This split of work shows why a directive like Article 47 binds both levels.

5.2 What do nutrition schemes look like?

Nutrition programmes are the Union and the States acting together on Article 47's first goal. The Poshan Abhiyaan and the Mid-Day Meal scheme are two examples. Each one links food to health and schooling. They also link back to Article 21A and Article 46.

- Public health: State List subject.
- Liquor: also a State subject.
- Union role: missions, funds and national laws.
- Nutrition schemes put the first goal of Article 47 into practice.

> **Quick check 3.** Article 47 itself imposes a total ban on alcohol across India. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

6 How has this topic been asked in exams?

6.1 What did the exams ask?

> **Asked before**
> **PYQ 1 · UPSC CSP 2017, Q23**
> Which of the following are the objectives of 'National Nutrition Mission'?
>
> (a) 1 and 2 only
> (b) 1, 2 and 3 only
> (c) 1, 2 and 4 only
> (d) 3 and 4 only
>
> mcqquestion.com/articles/upsc-csp-2017-general-studies-paper-i-full-question-paper/#q23

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6.2 What is the exam angle?

- **Trap:** Article 47 is a Fundamental Right. It is a Directive Principle.
- **Trap:** It bans alcohol nationwide. It asks the State to endeavour.
- **Fact:** Nutrition, living standard and public health are "primary duties".
- **Fact:** Vincent 1987 and Paschim Banga 1996 link health to Article 21.
- **Fact:** Khoday 1995: no fundamental right to trade in liquor.

- **Method:** Public health and liquor are State subjects.

Practice MCQs

1. Article 47 of the Constitution places a duty on the State to raise the level of nutrition and, in particular, to endeavour to bring about prohibition of?

A. Intoxicating drinks and drugs injurious to health

B. Untouchability

C. Bonded labour

D. Child labour

See answer ↓

2. According to Article 37, although the Directive Principles cannot be enforced by courts, it is the duty of the State to?

A. Apply them only to Union Territories

B. Ignore them while making laws

C. Apply them only after a national Emergency is proclaimed

D. Apply them in making laws

See answer ↓

3. Unlike Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy are?

A. Enforceable only during an Emergency

B. Enforceable only by the Supreme Court

C. Justiciable in every High Court

D. Not enforceable by any court

See answer ↓

4. Which of the following best describes the essential purpose behind including Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution?

A. To restrict the powers of the judiciary

B. To centralise all administrative power

C. To establish purely political democracy

D. To establish social and economic democracy alongside political democracy

See answer ↓

5. Article 48 of the Constitution directs the State to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on?

A. Modern and scientific lines

B. Cooperative ownership only

C. Purely traditional lines

D. Foreign investment models

See answer ↓

6. Article 43 of the Constitution directs the State to endeavour to secure workers a?

A. Living wage and a decent standard of life

B. Uniform civil code

C. Separate judiciary

D. Free legal aid system

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **A.** Article 47 directs the State to raise nutrition and public health standards and to endeavour to prohibit intoxicating drinks and injurious drugs. ↑ Q1
2. **D.** Article 37 states it shall be the duty of the State to apply the Directive Principles while making laws, even though courts cannot enforce them. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** Article 37 declares that the Directive Principles shall not be enforceable by any court, even though they are fundamental in governing the country. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** The Directive Principles aim to establish social and economic democracy, complementing the political democracy secured by Fundamental Rights. ↑ Q4
5. **A.** Article 48 directs the State to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines. ↑ Q5
6. **A.** Article 43 directs the State to endeavour to secure a living wage and decent standard of life for workers, agricultural, industrial or otherwise. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** ↑ 1
2. **True.** ↑ 2
3. **False.** ↑ 3

Previous year answers

1. **(a) 1 and 2 only** The Mission's real objectives centre on malnutrition awareness among pregnant women and lactating mothers, and reducing anaemia among young children, adolescent girls and women. There is no NNM/POSHAN Abhiyaan objective promoting millets, coarse cereals, unpolished rice, or poultry eggs — those belong to separate food-security or agriculture initiatives.

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