Ancient History · GS - I

What are the main features of Vedic society and religion? Do you think some of the features are still prevailing in Indian society?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2023	GS - I	Ancient History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Examine the evolution from early to later Vedic society; discuss family, kinship, social stratification, women, economy and political institutions; explain Vedic religious practices and their transformation; identify continuities in rituals, philosophical ideas, social institutions and cultural traditions while recognising major changes in modern constitutional India.

Model Answer

Introduction

Vedic society developed over a long period and was not static. The **Early Vedic period** was relatively pastoral and tribal, while the **Later Vedic period** witnessed settled agriculture, territorial kingdoms and increasing social stratification. Its religious and social institutions left a lasting influence on Indian civilisation.

Body

Main Features of Vedic Society

Social organisation:

The family was the basic social unit, generally patriarchal in character. Kinship and clan relationships were important. In the Later Vedic period, the **varna system** became increasingly structured, with greater social differentiation.

Position of women:

Women in the Early Vedic period participated in religious and intellectual activities and some women composed hymns. Their position became relatively more restricted during the Later Vedic period.

Economy:

The Early Vedic economy was predominantly pastoral, with cattle serving as an important measure of wealth. Later, agriculture, iron technology, crafts and trade became increasingly significant.

Political institutions:

Institutions such as **Sabha and Samiti** played important roles in the Early Vedic period. Later, hereditary kingship and territorial states became stronger.

Features of Vedic Religion

Religion initially centred on **nature deities** such as Indra, Agni, Varuna and Surya. Sacrificial rituals, offerings and hymns were important. During the Later Vedic period, rituals became more elaborate and priestly authority increased.

The Upanishadic phase gradually encouraged philosophical inquiry into **Brahman, Atman, karma and moksha**, shifting emphasis from ritual towards knowledge and spiritual enquiry.

Continuities in Contemporary India

Several cultural elements continue in transformed forms:

Ritual traditions: Fire rituals, mantras, yajnas and certain marriage ceremonies retain Vedic elements.

Philosophical ideas: Concepts such as karma, dharma, moksha and spiritual enquiry remain influential.

Family and social traditions: Kinship, marriage rituals and family-centred social life retain elements of historical continuity.

Language and culture: Sanskrit continues to influence religious vocabulary, literature and cultural traditions.

However, the constitutional framework of modern India fundamentally differs from Vedic social organisation through **equality before law, universal citizenship, abolition of untouchability and protection of individual rights**.

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Conclusion

Vedic society contributed significantly to India's cultural and intellectual foundations. Yet continuity should not be confused with sameness. Contemporary India represents a **selective cultural inheritance combined with substantial social, constitutional and democratic transformation**.

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