Society & Social Justice · GS - I

Customs and traditions suppress reason leading to obscurantism. Do you agree?

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2020	GS - I	Society & Social Justice

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Critical thinking; social continuity; obscurantism and superstition; caste and gender discrimination; reform movements; constitutional morality; scientific temper; rational reinterpretation of traditions

Model Answer

Introduction

Customs and traditions transmit collective memory, social values and cultural identity. However, when they are treated as unquestionable authorities, they may suppress rational inquiry and perpetuate obscurantism. Their impact therefore depends on how society interprets and practises them.

How customs can suppress reason

- **Superstition:** Uncritical adherence to beliefs may discourage scientific explanations and evidence-based decision-making.
- **Social discrimination:** Caste-based exclusion and untouchability have historically been justified through customary practices.
- **Gender inequality:** Certain traditions restrict women's mobility, education, property rights or participation in public life.
- **Resistance to reform:** Practices may persist because of social pressure, even when they cause harm.
- **Public health consequences:** Reliance on unverified beliefs instead of scientific advice can undermine healthcare and public welfare.

Why traditions should not be rejected wholesale

- **Social cohesion:** Shared customs provide continuity, belonging and collective identity.
- **Ethical values:** Traditions may preserve compassion, hospitality, community solidarity and respect for nature.
- **Cultural diversity:** Local practices and indigenous knowledge can contain valuable ecological and social insights.
- **Capacity for reform:** Indian reformers have reinterpreted traditions to challenge inequality. Raja Ram Mohan Roy opposed sati, while Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule challenged caste and gender-based exclusion.

Way forward

The Constitution protects cultural freedom while upholding equality, dignity and fundamental rights. Scientific temper, education, open debate and constitutional morality can help distinguish beneficial traditions from harmful practices. Customs should remain open to scrutiny, reinterpretation and reform.

Conclusion

Customs become instruments of obscurantism when they prohibit questioning and violate human dignity. A progressive society neither accepts every tradition blindly nor rejects its cultural inheritance indiscriminately; it evaluates traditions through reason, evidence and constitutional values.

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