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Q1(c)

Dharma versus Religion

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 2 · 10 marks · Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization

1.1 Evolution of the Indian Culture and Civilization-Prehistoric (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Neolithic-Chalcolithic), Protohistoric (Indus Civilization). Pre-Harappan, Harappan and post-Harappan cultures. Contributions of the tribal cultures to Indian civilization.

Core demand of the question

- Write a note on Dharma versus Religion
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length of about 150 words

Revision summary

Dharma means duty and order tied to role and group.

Religion names a congregational faith with creed and conversion.

Kane and Dumont keep dharma as law and hierarchy, not a church.

Article 25 forces Indian practice into the legal word religion.

Colonial translation flattened duty, sect, and civil law into one noun.

Introduction

Dharma in Indian usage is duty, order, and right conduct tied to person, stage, and group. Religion, in the Latin-Christian sense, is a named faith with creed, church, and conversion.

Body**Two vocabularies**

- **P. V. Kane** treated dharma as a legal-ethical field covering kingship, caste duty, and rite, not as a single church.
- **Louis Dumont** contrasted homo hierarchicus, ordered by dharma, with the Western individual of a congregational religion.
- **M. N. Srinivas** showed that village practice mixes purity, festival, and jati duty. That mix is dharma on the ground, not a Sunday congregation.

Why the contrast matters

- **Article 25** of the Constitution uses the word religion for freedom of conscience. Courts then have to decide whether a practice is essential religion or social dharma.
- Colonial **census** and mission schools translated dharma as religion, which flattened jati duty, sect, and civil law into one English noun.
- The anthropological task is to keep both words. Dharma is relational duty. Religion is a modern legal box for faith.

Flow diagram

Dharma duty order -> Kane shastra
Religion creed church -> Census Article 25
Dharma duty order -> Village jati rite

Conclusion

Dharma is an Indian order of duties. Religion is a later administrative name for faith. Using one word for both hides caste, kingship, and law.

Facts & figures

P. V. Kane

History of Dharmasastra treated dharma as a vast legal-ethical literature, not a single faith.

Louis Dumont

Read Indian social order through dharma and hierarchy rather than through a Western church model.

Article 25

Constitutional freedom of religion that courts apply to practices once classed as dharma.

Census

Colonial enumeration that asked Indians to name a religion, compressing sect and jati into one label.