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Q19

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

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS I · 15 marks · World's Physical Geography

Salient features of world's physical geography.

### **Core demand of the question**

- Customs and traditions suppress reason leading to obscurantism. Do you agree?
- Keep a 15-mark length

### **Revision summary**

Harmful unexamined custom does suppress reason and becomes obscurantism.

Child marriage, honour violence, and ritual humiliation are exhibits.

Craft, grove, and care customs can hold empirical knowledge.

**Article 51A(h)** asks for scientific temper, not cultural demolition.

- **Stand:** partial agreement, reform the closed custom, keep the arguable one.

### **Introduction**

Custom is inherited practice. Reason is public argument. When custom forbids evidence - witch hunts, child marriage, ritual humiliation - it becomes obscurantism. When custom carries diet, craft, and care, it is social memory. Agreement with the statement should be partial and sharp, not a war on all tradition.

### **Body**

#### **Where the charge holds**

- Practices that punish questions - honour violence, khap bans on marriage, superstition as medicine - suppress reason and harm the body.
- Gendered custom has long blocked girls' schooling and widow rights; reformers from Rammohan to **Phule**, Narayana Guru, and **Ambedkar** used reason and law against that obscurantism.
- Communal myth as history, and astrology as public policy, are tradition-talk used to avoid evidence.

#### **Where the charge overreaches**

- Not every custom is anti-reason. Panchayat water-sharing, sacred grove protection, and craft guilds can be empirical knowledge in another idiom.
- Blind modernism can itself be dogmatic. Scientific temper (**Article 51A(h)**) is a constitutional duty, not a licence to sneer at every festival.
- Living traditions reform from inside - bhakti critique, Sikh langar, Buddhist reason - which shows custom is not a sealed dark room.

## How a republic should stand

- Agree that unexamined custom breeds obscurantism when it claims immunity from harm tests.
- Disagree that tradition as such is the enemy of reason. The enemy is authority that cannot be argued with.
- **Tools:** education, IPC and special laws against harmful practices, and reformers who speak the community's language.
- Courts already balance **Articles 25-26** with dignity and public order; that is reason disciplining custom without erasing religion.

## Flow diagram

Custom -> Harmful unexamined  
Custom -> Memory craft care  
Harmful unexamined -> Obscurantism  
Reform education law -> Public reason  
Memory craft care -> Public reason

## Conclusion

Agree that many customs have suppressed reason and produced obscurantism. Do not agree that tradition is only a darkener. Keep the practices that can face evidence; drop those that cannot. That is the constitutional middle.

## Facts & figures

### Article 51A(h)

Fundamental duty to develop scientific temper, humanism, and the spirit of inquiry.

### Ambedkar

Used constitutional reason against caste custom as living obscurantism.

### Sati abolition lineage

Nineteenth-century reform where reason and law confronted a lethal custom.

### Articles 25-26

Religious freedom limited by public order, morality, and health - a reason test.

### Khap honour bans

Contemporary example of custom claiming veto over adult reason and law.