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Q1(b)

"Banning practice of 'Sati' is attributed to annihilation of a major social evil in colonial India." Comment.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Tribal communities in India

Tribal communities in India: Definitional problems; Geographical spread; Colonial policies and tribes; Issues of integration and autonomy.

Core demand of the question

- "Banning practice of 'Sati' is attributed to annihilation of a major social evil in colonial India." Comment
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

The 1829 ban criminalised widow burning after reformist pressure.

It was a major legal strike at a sacralised evil.

Widowhood as social death continued in property and honour.

Colonial law also staged India as backward tradition.

Annihilation needs kinship change, not only a prohibition.

Introduction

The colonial ban on sati was a real strike at a spectacular patriarchal evil. It was not the annihilation of the social structure that made widows disposable.

Body**What the ban did**

- Regulation XVII of 1829 in Bengal Presidency criminalised widow burning, after **Rammohun Roy's** campaign and official inquiry.
- It named women's death as a public crime, a heterogenetic legal shock to a 'tradition' that honour had sacralised.

What it did not annihilate

- Seed-and-Earth kinship, which Leela Dube later named, still treated the widow as a dangerous field without the rightful seed.
- Property, tonsure, and confinement continued as everyday sati of a life, which the pyre ban did not end.
- Colonial officials also constructed 'tradition' as India's backward mark, a theme of later critique of colonial sociology.

Sociological comment

- Annihilation of an evil needs law plus a change in entitlement. The ban was necessary and incomplete.

Flow diagram

1829 sati ban -> Criminalises pyre
Patriarchal property honour -> Widow still diminished
1829 sati ban -> Patriarchal property honour

Conclusion

Banning sati attacked a major evil and saved lives. Attributing annihilation to the ban alone overstates a statute. Patriarchy in the family outlived the pyre.

Facts & figures

Regulation XVII, 1829

Bengal Presidency law that prohibited sati.

Rammohun Roy

Reform voice that made the pyre a public scandal.

Seed and Earth

Kinship ideology that devalues the woman when the husband-seed is gone.

Social death of the widow

Everyday restrictions that survived the legal ban.

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