



Mains Practice Question

Q. Religion in India was never static in character but was driven by an inherent dynamic strength. Explain. (250 words)

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Approach

- Briefly define religion and describe its importance in India.
- Discuss the dynamic nature of religion in India through different religions that evolved through the ages.
- Conclude by summarizing your answer.

Introduction

Religion is the science of relation between man and soul. Morality and ethics have their foundation on religion. It plays an important part in the lives of the Indians from the earliest times. Religious ideas, thoughts and practices differed among groups, and transformations and developments took place in the various religious forms in the course of time. In India religion through ages had assumed different forms in relation to different groups of people associated with them.

Body

Pre-Vedic and Vedic Religion

- From archaeological findings, it seems that people were worshippers of the forces of nature like the sun and the moon.
- The nature of the religious beliefs and practices of the Aryans is also known from the Rig Veda, They believed in many gods like Indra, Varuna, Agni, Surya and Rudra.
 - Sacrifices and ritual offering of food and drink to fire in honour of the Gods, constituted the main religious practices.
 - The Sama Veda and the Yajur Veda elaborated the different aspects of the sacrificial acts and this ritualism was further elaborated in the Brahmanas.
- The Atharva Veda contained a great deal of **animistic beliefs**.

Unorthodox religious movements

- It includes Jainism and Buddhism along with many other creeds.
- Both Buddhism and Jainism were atheistic creeds in the beginning. However, Buddhism endorsed the doctrine of the Law of Karma
- Many of these viewpoints are also found in the major Upanishads.

Theistic Religions

- Influence of pre-Vedic and post-Vedic folk elements was most conspicuous in the origin of theistic religions.

- The primary factor that motivated these creeds was Bhakti.
- This led to the evolution of different religious sects like **Vaishnavism, Shaivism** and **Shaktism**.
- These sects in course of time came to have a significant impact on the popular forms of Buddhism and Jainism.

Vaishnava Movement

- The history of the Vaishnava movement from the end of the Gupta period till the first decade of the thirteenth century AD is mainly concerned with South India. The poet-saints known as **alvars**.
- They preached single-minded devotion for Vishnu.

Shaivism Movement

- Shaivism had its origin in antiquity unlike Vaishnavism. The Shaiva movement in the South flourished at the beginning through the activities of many of the 63 saints known in Tamil as **Nayanars**.
- Panini refers to a group of Shivaworshippers as Shiva-Bhagavata, who were characterised by the iron lances and clubs they carried and their skin garments.

Minor Religious Movements

- Worship of the female principle (Shakti) and of Surya did not achieve equal importance.
- In the Vedic age, respect was shown also to the female principle as the Divine Mother, the Goddess of abundance and personified energy.
- However, a clear reference to the exclusive worshippers of the Devi is not to be found until a comparatively late period.

Conclusion

Every system of religious philosophy in India is a quest for Truth, which is one and the same, always and everywhere. The modes of approach differ, logic varies, but the purpose remains the same - trying to reach that Truth. Despite having so many different religions and cultures evolving across different time periods, India has taught the world tolerance and universal acceptance. Hence, India with its inherent dynamic strength gave the world so many different religions.