



Mains Practice Question

Q. What was the idea behind “privy purse” and its abolition? Do you think the concept of the privy purse was justified in a democratic nation committed to socio-economic justice and equality? (250 words)

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Introduction

With the passage of the Indian Independence Act, 1947, the British Government granted independence to the areas that were directly under their rule (British India) and left the choice to the princely states to decide their future course of action. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel persuaded these princely states to join Indian Union after independence.

In consideration of such princely states signing the Instrument of Accession, the Government of India granted to them a ‘privy purse’, which was a specified sum of money that was payable annually to the rulers of such States.

Body

Relevance of ‘privy purse’

- The payments of ‘privy purse’ were made to the former rulers under constitutional provisions of Art. 291 and Art. 362. However, it was often questioned as a relic of the **colonial past**.
- Privy purse conferred ‘special status’ to ruling class, which continued the British practice of ruler and ruled.
- It went against the idea of equality enshrined in Preamble and Part 3 of the Constitution.
- Moreover, ‘privy purse’ was an added economic pressure on a newly born independent nation, that was ridden with **poverty, hunger and security challenges**.

Therefore, the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, argued the case for abolition of privy purse. So, by the **26th Amendment to the Constitution of India in 1971**, ‘privy purse’ was abolished. The amendment led to the **omission of Articles 291 and 362**.

Reasons for abolition of ‘privy purse’

- The abolition of privy purse was needed because it went against the idea of equal rights for all citizens, as enshrined under fundamental rights of Indian constitution.
- The concept of rulership, with ‘privy purse’ and special privileges was incompatible with principles of democracy, equality and social justice and it was unrelated to any current functions and social purposes.
- In order to fulfill the aspiration of socialistic pattern of society and burgeoning economic pressure, due to 1971 refugee crisis from east Pakistan, there was a need for the Government to reduce revenue deficit.

Conclusion

- Though the abolition of privy purse was alleged as constitutional fraud by the rulers of princely

states, but it was in sync with ethos of egalitarian society, as envisaged by the constitution.

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