

Examrace

Competitive Exams: Main Reforms of Caste System

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Reforms

There have been challenges to the caste system from the time of Buddha, and from the time of Mahavira (Jaina founder) and (still earlier) of Gosala Maskarin (ajavika founder) .

Opposition to the system of varna ('caste') is regularly asserted already in the Yoga Upanishad-s (of early mediaeval date) ; and is a constant feature of Cana-acara tantrism (Chinese-derived movement in Asom, and also of mediaeval date) . The Natha system (likewise mediaeval) founded by Matsya-indra Natha and by Go-rakana Natha, and spread throughout India, has likewise been in consistent opposition to the system of varana.

Many Bhakti period saints rejected the caste discriminations and accepted all castes, including untouchables, into their fold. During the British Raj, this sentiment gathered steam, and many Hindu reform movements such as Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj renounced caste-based discrimination. The inclusion of so-called untouchables into the mainstream was argued for by many social reformers (see Historical criticism, below) . Mahatma Gandhi called them "Harijans" (children of God) although that term is now considered patronizing and the term Dalit ("downtrodden") is the more commonly used. Gandhi's contribution toward the emancipation of the untouchables is still debated, especially in the commentary of his contemporary Dr. B R Ambedkar, an untouchable himself, who frequently saw Gandhi's activities as detrimental to the cause of upliftment of his people.

The practice of untouchability was formally outlawed by the Constitution of India in 1950, and has declined significantly since then. K R Narayanan, who became the President of India in 1997, and K. G. Balakrishnan (the present Chief Justice of India) have belonged to castes formerly considered untouchable.

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