

# Competitive Exams: Main Features of Caste System Caste & race

## Caste and Race

Allegations that caste amounts to race were addressed and rejected by B R Ambedkar, an advocate for Dalit rights and critic of untouchability. He wrote that

“The Brahmin of Punjab is racially of the same stock as the Chamar (Dalit) of Punjab. The Caste system does not demarcate racial division. Caste system is a social division of people of the same race”

Such allegations have also been rejected by many sociologists such as Andre Bataille, who writes that treating caste as a form of racism is “politically mischievous” and worse, “scientifically nonsensical” since there is no discernible difference in the racial characteristics between Brahmins and Scheduled Castes. He writes that “Every social group cannot be regarded as a race simply because we want to protect it against prejudice and discrimination”

The Indian government also rejects the claims of equivalency between Caste and Racial discrimination, pointing out that the caste issues as essentially intra-racial and intra-cultural. Indian Attorney General Soli Sorabjee insisted that “he only reason India wants caste discrimination kept off the agenda is that it will distract participants from the main topic: Racism. Caste discrimination in India is undeniable but caste and race are entirely distinct” Many scholars dispute the claim that casteism is akin to racism. The view of the caste system as “static and unchanging” has been disputed. Sociologists describe how the perception of the caste system as a static and textual stratification has given way to the perception of the caste system as a more processual, empirical and contextual stratification. Others have applied theoretical models to explain mobility and flexibility in the caste system in India. According to these scholars, groups of lower-caste individuals could seek to elevate the status of their caste by attempting to emulate the practices of higher castes.

Sociologist M N Srinivas has also debated the question of rigidity in Caste. For details see sanskritization.

Pakistani-American sociologist Ayesha Jalal also rejects these allegations. In her book, “Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia” she writes that “As for Hinduism, the hierarchical principles of the Brahmanical social order have always been contested from within Hindu society, suggesting that equality has been and continues to be both valued and practiced.”

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In India, some observers felt that the caste system must be viewed as a system of exploitation of poor low-ranking groups by more prosperous high-ranking groups. In many parts of India, land is largely held by high-ranking property owners of the dominant castes that economically exploit low-ranking landless labourers and poor artisans, all the while degrading them with ritual emphases on their so-called god-given inferior status.

Matt Cherry, claims that karma underpins the caste system, and the caste system traditionally determines the position and role of every member of Hindu society. Caste determines an individual's place in society, the work he or she may carry out, and who he or she may marry and meet. According to him, Hindus believe that the karma of previous life will determine the caste an individual will be (re) born into:

According to Stanford University scholar Oman Jain, there is no caste system currently in place in India.

On 29 March 2007, the Supreme Court of India, as an interim measure, stayed the law providing for 27 percent reservation for Other Backward Classes in educational institutions like IITs and IIMs. This was done in response to a public interest litigation Ashoka Kumar Thakur vs. Union of India. The Court held that the 1931 census could not be a determinative factor for identifying the OBCs for the purpose of providing reservation. The court also observed, "Reservation cannot be permanent and appear to perpetuate backwardness"