

Examrace

Competitive Exams: Main Features of Caste System in India

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Caste System in India

The Indian caste system describes the social stratification and social restrictions in the Indian subcontinent, in which social classes are defined by thousands of endogamous hereditary groups, often termed as jatis or castes. Within a jati, there exist exogamous groups known as gotras, the lineage or clan of an individual, although in a handful of sub-castes like Shakadvipi, endogamy within a gotra is permitted and alternative mechanisms of restricting endogamy are used (e. g. Banning endogamy within a surname).

Although generally identified with Hinduism, the caste system was also observed among followers of other religions in the Indian subcontinent, including some groups of Muslims and Christians. The Indian Constitution has outlawed caste-based discrimination, in keeping with the socialist, secular, democratic principles that founded the nation. Caste barriers have mostly broken down in large cities, though they persist in rural areas of the country, where 72% of India's population resides. Nevertheless, the caste system, in various forms, continues to survive in modern India strengthened by a combination of social perceptions and divisive politics.

History

There is no universally accepted theory about the origin of the Indian caste system. The Indian classes are similar to the ancient Iranian classes ("pistras"), wherein the priests are Athravans, the warriors are Rathaestha, the merchants are Vastriya, and the artisans are Huiti.

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