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Q2(c)

Do you think that the Indian saints have brought about social reform and awareness in Indian society? Explain

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2019 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 marks · Impact of colonial rule on Indian society

Impact of colonial rule on Indian society: Social background of Indian nationalism; Modernization of Indian tradition; Protests and movements during the colonial period; Social reforms.

Core demand of the question

- Do you think that the Indian saints have brought about social reform and awareness in Indian society? Explain
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Bhakti and Sikh saints attacked priestly monopoly in a religious idiom.

Vernacular devotion spread a language of common worth.

Later anti-caste politics drew on that memory.

Caste property and gender honour often survived the hymn.

Law and movements completed what saints began as awareness.

Introduction

Yes, many Indian saints spread reform and awareness, but they did so inside a religious idiom. They dented ritual arrogance more often than they dismantled caste property.

Body

What saints did

- Bhakti and Sikh saint traditions preached a direct God and a common congregation, which weakened priestly monopoly for those who heard **Kabir**, Nanak, or the **Warkari** saints.
- They created public languages of equality in the vernacular, a heterogenetic spark Yogendra Singh would still place inside tradition.
- **Some lineages fed later reform:** anti-caste memory that **Phule** and **Ambedkar** could radicalise into law and organisation.

Limits

- Ghurje's Hindu civilisational frame can absorb saints as inner vitality without ending endogamy.
- Otherworldly bhakti can soothe hierarchy rather than strike landlords, which A. R. Desai would stress.
- Gender often remained seed-and-earth honour, even when a woman saint sang.

Awareness today

- Sant literature still teaches dignity. Structural change needed Constitution, reservation, and movements, not only kirtan.

Flow diagram

Saints bhakti Sikh -> Vernacular equality
Vernacular equality -> Reform awareness
Caste property -> Limit without law

Conclusion

Indian saints brought reform as devotion and as critique of empty ritual. They raised awareness of a shared human worth. Lasting civil equality required political and legal struggle beyond the shrine.

Facts & figures

Kabir

Saint-poet whose critique of empty ritual and caste pride remains a reform resource.

Guru Nanak

Founded a sangat that refused Brahmanical monopoly of the sacred.

Warkari

Maharashtra pilgrimage tradition that mixed castes in devotion, not in land law.

Ambedkar

Turned anti-caste moral critique into constitutional annihilation of caste as civic status.

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