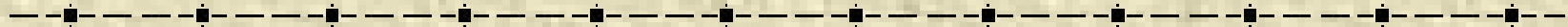


# The Hindu Caste System

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## Social Structure in India

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# How Caste Shapes Society

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## Definition:

**A type of social organization/hierarchy in which a person's occupation and position in life is determined by the circumstances of his birth.**

# How Caste Shapes Society

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- **Rigid, hereditary membership into birth caste**
- **Marriage only among member of same caste**
- **Occupation choices restricted**
- **Personal contact with other castes restricted**
- **Acceptance of fixed place in society**

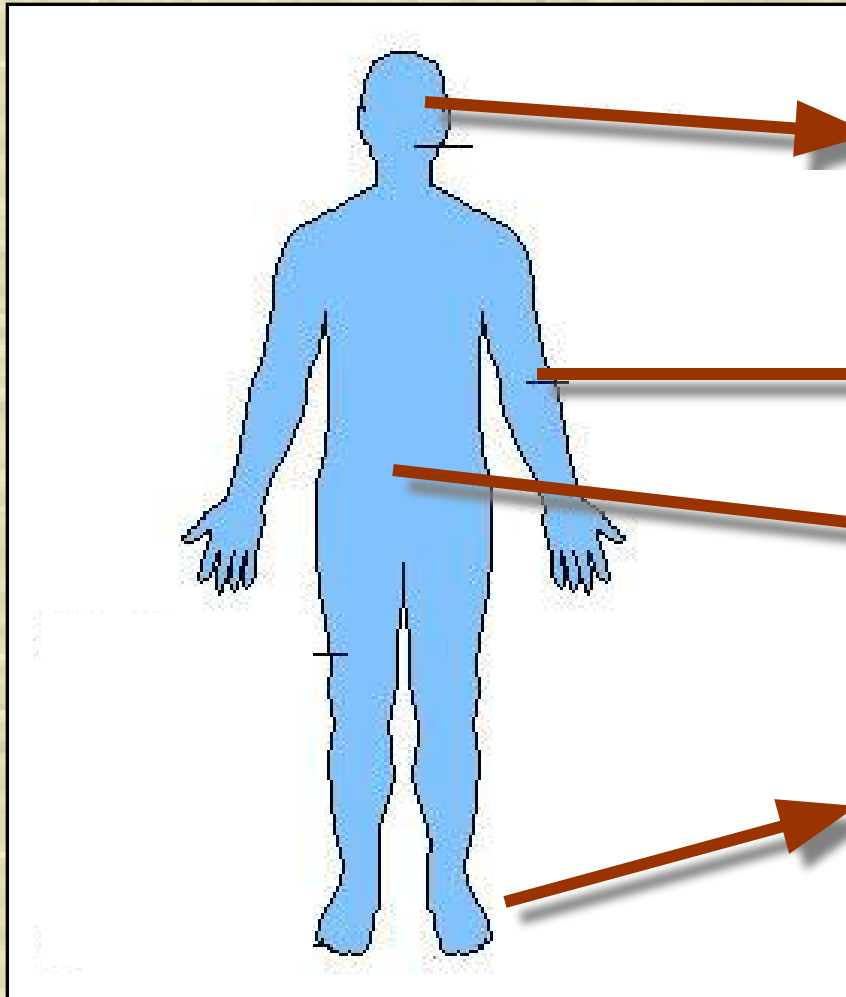
# Caste Systems Benefits

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- **Members of a caste rely on each other for support**



# Caste Systems Benefits

Each caste is born out of Brahma (the creator)



**Brahmins—thinkers  
/knowers**

**Ksatriya—doers**

**Vaisya—provide  
food for the belly**

**Sudra—do the work**

# A System of Reciprocity and Redistribution

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- Each caste has an occupation(s) and contributes to the good of the whole
- *Jajman*—gives gift (landlord)
- *Kamin*—gives service to the landholder (lower castes)

# Traditional Village System

Landholder gives grain to...

Barber

Blacksmith

Carpenter

Potter

Priest

Today...more of a market system



# How One's Caste is Determined

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- *Reincarnation*

**A person is born, lives, dies, and is reborn again many times. Souls are reborn many times until they are pure enough to be with the creator, Brahma**

- *Karma*

**A person's social position in the next life is determined by his conduct in the present life.**

# How One's Caste is Determined

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- *Dharma*
- **Code of behavior or set of moral and ethical rules that govern the conduct of each social class. Each group has a different set of rules to live by.**
- *Laws of Manu*
- **Hindu book of sacred law**
- **Rules and restrictions for daily life**

# The Four Castes

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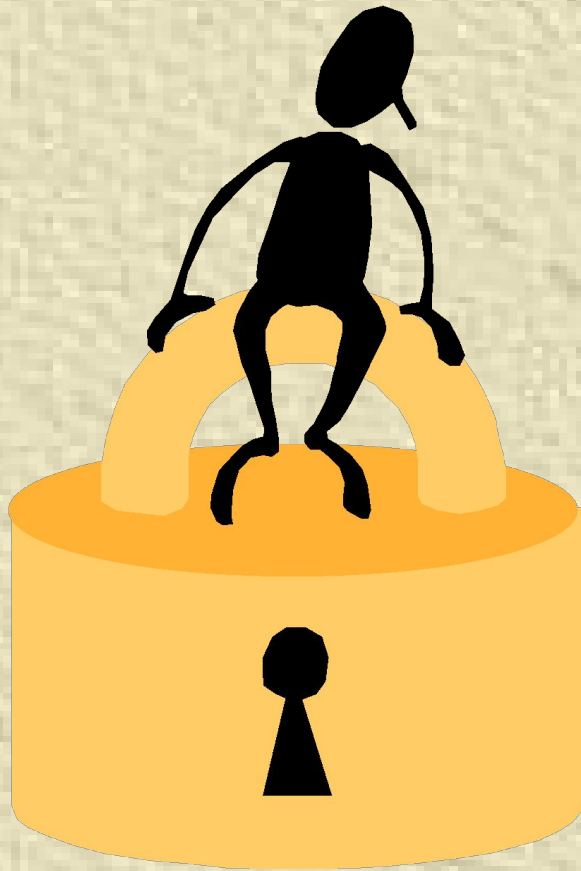
- **Brahmins** – Priests, Teachers, Judges; usually don't own land therefore need other castes to work the land and provide for them
- **Kshatriyas** – Warriors and Rulers (landowners)
- **Vaisyas** – Skilled Traders, Merchants, Farmers

# The Four Castes

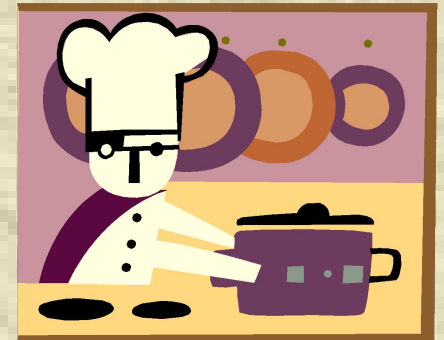
- **Sudras** – Unskilled Workers—Laborers and Craft workers
- Below these four castes are people who belong to no caste
- **Untouchables** – Outcastes, Children of God
- **Concept of pollution**...the most pure at the top (Brahmins) and the most polluted at the bottom (Untouchables)

# Brahmins - Priests

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- Purpose is to help people of other castes fulfill their dharma
- Perform rituals and observe vows for the sake of others



# Kshatriyas - Warriors and Rulers

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- **Responsible for leadership of the people**
- **Often rely on advice from Brahmins**



# Vaisyas – Skilled Traders, Merchants

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- Shopkeepers who sell *products* (unlike the Shudra who sell services)



# Sudras – Unskilled Workers

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- **Each subgroup of this caste performs a specific service.**
- **Jobs include gardeners, potters, and clothes washers**



# Untouchables - The Outcastes

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- **Belong to no caste**
- **Expected to do the “dirty” jobs**
- **Come in contact with animal skins, dead bodies and human feces**
- **Avoid contact with “caste” Indians for fear of “pollution”**





# Source

<http://www.csuchico.edu/~cheinz/syllabi/asst001/spring98/16.htm>

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