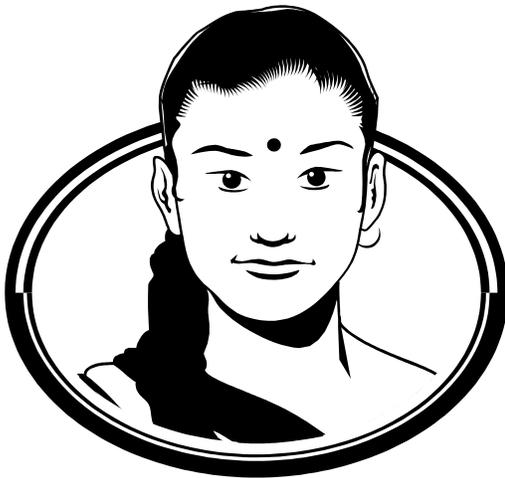


The Hindu Class System

The following passages are short historical explanations of the origins and descriptions of the Hindu social class system. The passages should answer the following questions:

- ✿ How did the social class system started?
 - ✿ How the socials class system got it name?
 - ✿ What are the levels of the social class system?
 - ✿ What are the roles and responsibilities of the different social classes?
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Origins of the Caste System (Varna)



After the Aryans conquered the people of the Indus Valley they realized they were grossly outnumbered so developed a social class system. They developed a social class system to prevent the native peoples of the Indus Valley, Dravidians and Nagas, from intermarrying with Aryans. The Aryans were very concerned with losing the ability to identify themselves separately from the Dravidians and Nagas. So they set up a system that forbade marriage outside their own class. This was the beginning of the Caste (kast) System. A caste is a class in which a person is born and remains his or her entire life.

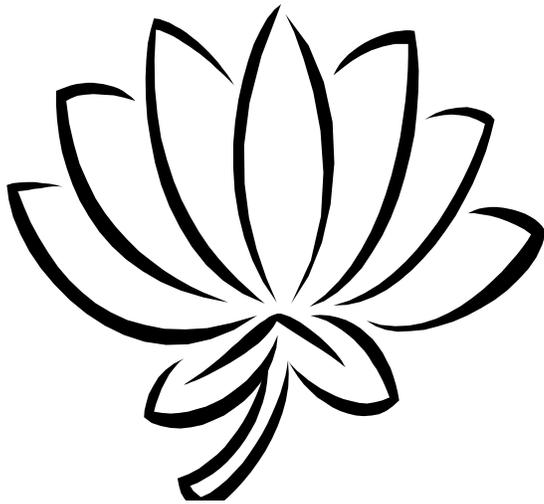
The Aryans always had a simple social class system. At the top of the social class system was the nobles, followed by priests, and then commoners. The commoners' social class was made up of farmers and craftsmen people. After conquering the Indus Valley people a new social class or *varna* was add to the Aryan social class system.

In the new social class were all of the dark-skinned people who were native to the Indus Valley. The early caste system was based on skin color. In fact, the word *varna* means color.

Although, people were expected to marry within their own caste or social class level they did not always follow that rule. As a result of different castes intermarrying the social class system was forced to change. The new caste system was not based on skin color but rather on occupation, your job. The new *varna* had four levels just like before but they Aryan high priest called Brahmins used a hymn from the Vedas to justify the new social classes. Take for example the excerpt from the verse, "The Hymn of Man."

"When they divide the Man, into how many parts did they apportion him? What do they call his mouth, his two arms, thighs, and feet?" "His mouth became the Brahmins; his arms were made into the Warrior, his thighs the People, and from his feet the Servants were born?" (Rig-Veda, 10.90 11, 12)

Using the human body metaphor, this hymn divides society into four distinct classes, or castes. The mouth is the Brahmin, priest. The arms are the Shatriyas or Kshatriyas, warriors and rulers. The thighs are the Vaishyas, skilled craftsmen and farmers. The feet are the Shudras or Sudras, servants.



Castes were not supposed to intermarry but they did anyway as a result they developed jatis, or castes subdivisions. For example if a couple within three higher castes marry their children were be a member of a new class level that is below the Vaishyas but above the Sudras. But if a person from one of the three upper classes should marry a Sudra or a non-Hindu their children would be Pariahs. Pariahs or untouchables were on the lowest social scale, the untouchables were considered to be the outcasts of society.

The system of jatis is complex and varied depending on the region and history of the location in India. Once a new jatis is developed the members the new jatis were encouraged not intermarry and to marry other people in their own subdivision.

Presently the constitution of India does not recognize the ancient caste system, prohibiting its social distinctions. Many Hindus believe the *varna* is unjust, separating the wealthy from the poor while providing no opportunity form betterment. Still, many of the system's jatis still exist, especially in the underdeveloped villages.