

India's Caste System

Top Caste: The Brahmins: The top caste was made up of scholars, priests, teachers, judges, and landowners. They were known as the Brahmin caste or Brahmins. Many Brahmins lived in temples, removed from society. Others spent a great deal of time in contemplation and meditation. Some were quite social.

The Kshatriya: Kshatriyas were the warriors. Rulers of towns and cities mostly came from the Kshatriya caste. Any decision they made, however, could be overruled by a member of the Brahmin, the caste above them.

The Vaishyas: Vaishyas were skilled farmers, merchants, and craftsmen. Vaishyas could hold office in village government. They might live in very nice houses. Even though they were three down on the social scale, they still had good clothes and ample food. They might not be the top leaders, but they were certainly a respected part of society.

Bottom Caste: The Sudras: The Sudras were the unskilled workers. They might find a job on a farm or a non-skilled job in a home or business like cleaning. They were the bottom caste.

The people without a caste, the Untouchables: There was one other social rank in ancient India. People who were born into this social rank were called Untouchables. These were the people who were considered the lowest in society in Hindu India, so low that they were not part of the caste system. They had no rights. If they had a job at all, other than begging, it was a degrading job that no one else wanted to do. If your parent was an Untouchable, so were you. Untouchables could not move up or marry out of their social rank.

Since 1950, the Indian Constitution has forbidden discrimination.