

## Indian Caste System

Instructions: Read the text and answer the questions.

The segregation of people based on their **Varna** (social class) was intended to [simplify] the responsibilities of one's life, preserve the purity of a caste, and establish eternal order... **In this system, specific tasks are designated to each Varna citizen.** A Brahmin behaving as a Kshatriya or a Vaishya debases himself, becoming unworthy of seeking liberation or moksha.

For a Brahmin (having become one by deed, in addition to the one by birth) is considered the society's mouth, and is the purest life form as per the Vedas, **because he personifies renunciation, austerity, piousness, striving only for wisdom and cultivated intellect. A Kshatriya, too, is required to remain loyal to his Varna duty; if he fails, he could be outcast.** The same applies to Vaishyas and Shudras. Shudras, far from left out or irrelevant, are the base of an economy, a strong support system of a prosperous economic system, provided they remain confined to their life duties and not give in to greed, immoral conduct, and excess self-indulgence.

The underlying reason for adhering to Varna duties is the belief in the attainment of moksha on being dutiful. Belief in the concept of Karma reinforces the belief in the Varna life principles. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras form the fourfold nature of society, each assigned appropriate life duties and ideal disposition.

**Brahmins:** Brahmins were revered as an incarnation of knowledge itself, endowed with the precepts and sermons to be discharged to all Varnas of society. They were not just revered because of their Brahmin birth but also their renunciation of worldly life and cultivation of divine qualities, assumed to be always engrossed in **the** contemplation of Brahman, hence called Brahmins. **Priests, gurus, rishis, teachers, and scholars constituted the Brahmin community.**

**Kshatriyas:** Kshatriyas **constituted the warrior clan, the kings, rulers of territories, administrators, etc.** It was **paramount** for a Kshatriya to be learned in weaponry, warfare, penance, austerity, administration, moral conduct, justice, and ruling. All Kshatriyas would be sent to a Brahmin's ashram from an early age until they became wholly equipped with **requisite** knowledge. Besides austerities like the Brahmins, they would gain additional knowledge of administration. **Their fundamental duty was to protect their territory, defend against attacks, deliver justice, govern virtuously, and extend peace and happiness to all their subjects,** and they would take counsel in matters of territorial sovereignty and ethical dilemmas from their Brahmin gurus.

**Vaishyas:** Vaishya is the... Varna represented by agriculturalists, traders, money lenders, and those involved in commerce. **Vaishyas... also... go to the Brahmins' ashram to learn the rules of a virtuous life and to refrain from intentional or accidental misconduct.** Cattle rearing was one of the most esteemed occupations of the Vaishyas, as the possession and quality of a kingdom's cows, elephants, horses, and their upkeep affected the quality of life and the associated prosperity of the citizens. Vaishyas would work in close coordination with the administrators of the kingdom to discuss, implement, and constantly upgrade the living standards by providing profitable economic prospects.

**Shudras:** **The...Varna represents the backbone of a prosperous economy,** in which they are revered for their dutiful conduct toward life duties set out for them. Scholarly views on Shudras are the most varied since there seemingly are more restrictions on their conduct. However, Atharva Veda allows Shudras to hear and learn the Vedas by heart, and the Mahabharata, too, supports the inclusion of Shudras in ashrams and their learning the Vedas. Becoming officiating priests in sacrifices organized by kings was, however, to a large extent restricted.

- 1) Which new vocabulary word in the first sentence refers to a person's 'social class' level?
  
- 2) According to the text, why were social classes so strictly segregated in Ancient India?
  
- 3) Which social class has the most power and prestige? How do you know?
  
- 4) Which social class has the least power and prestige? How do you know?
  
- 5) What are the duties or responsibilities of the Brahmin class?

- 6) What are the duties or responsibilities of the Kshatriya class?
- 7) What sort of occupation do people of the Kshatriya class have?
- 8) Who were the Vaishyas?
- 9) What are the duties or responsibilities of the Vaishyas class?
- 10) What are the duties or responsibilities of the Shudras class?