

Basic Hindu Beliefs & the Caste System

Caste System (Social Structure)

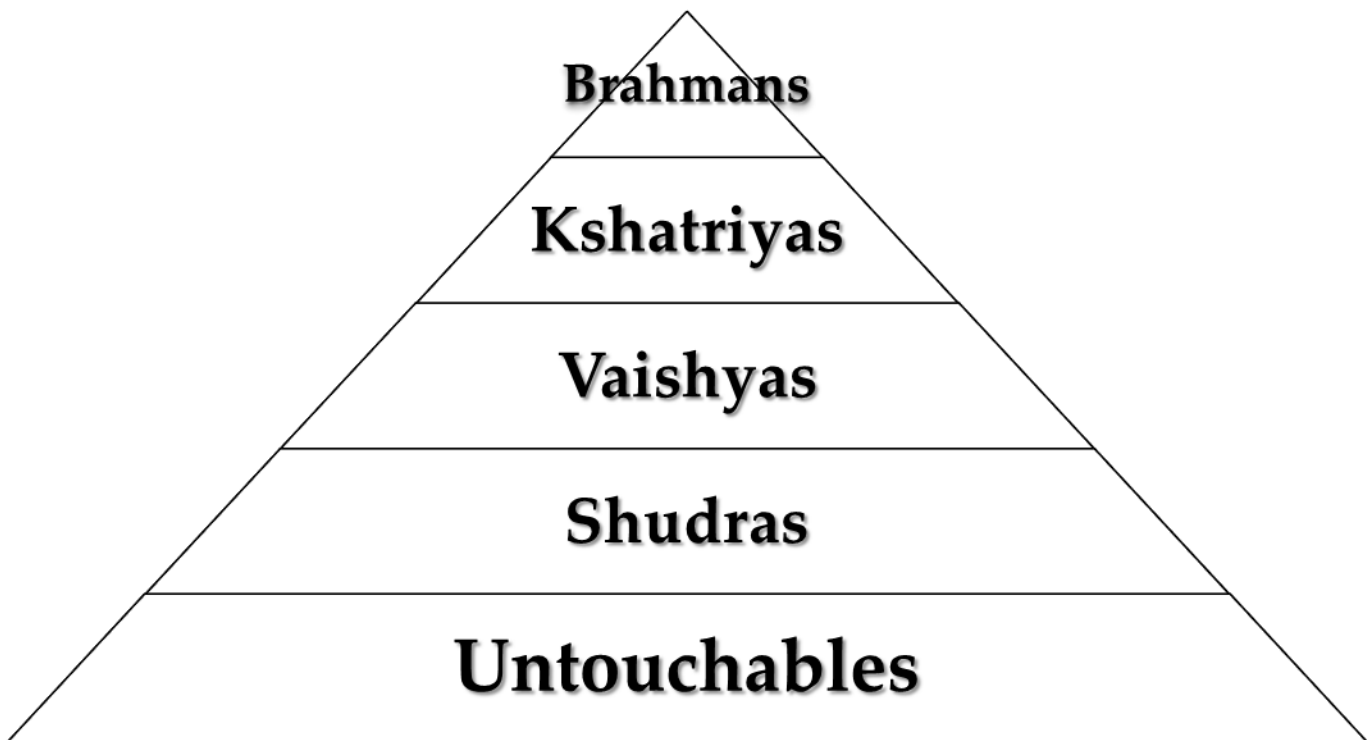
Strict social structure where the caste you are born into is the one you stay in the whole of your life; you do not mix with anyone other than those of your caste

Caste controls the following:

- Diet
- Clothing
- Where they live
- Who they marry

Different castes never mixed socially or lived in the same area

According to Indian tradition, castes emerged from the mouth, arms, legs, and feet of Purusha, the first human



Brahmins

Priests (scholars / teachers)

- Performed religious ceremonies (sacrificed food to the gods)
- Studied the Vedas (4 Holy Books of Aryans)
- Depended on to say the prayers properly and repeat the right hymns or terrible things would happen
- Passed knowledge to the next generation by word of mouth

Kshatriyas

Warriors

- Took charge of the army and government
- Led councils of elders who ran the villages
- Could study Vedas, but could not teach them

Vaishyas

Merchants / Land-owning Farmers / Artisans

- Sold or traded goods
- Became very prosperous
- Some tended cattle or farmed
- Some loaned money (bankers)

Shudras


Slaves / Servants / Unskilled Laborers / Tenant Farmers

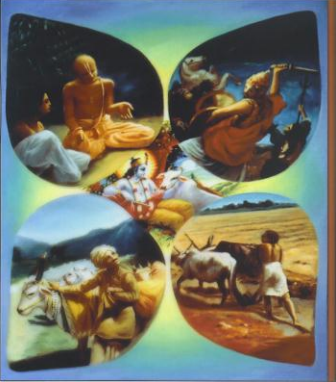


- Poorest and least educated caste
- Served the higher castes in Indian society

Untouchables

Untouchables

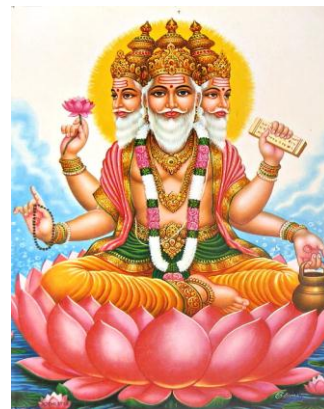
- Included tanners, butchers, gravediggers, garbage collectors
- Not allowed to live in villages but in huts at the outskirts
- If a higher caste person was touched by an untouchable or even had the shadow of one fall on them, they had to go through certain religious ceremonies to get rid of the “pollution”

HINDU BELIEF	KEY POINTS ABOUT THE BELIEF	SYMBOL FOR THE BELIEF
BRAHMAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Brahman = name for Hinduism’s one Supreme God or Spirit</u> ■ Brahman <u>creates, maintains, destroys, and recreates the universe in a never-ending cycle</u> ■ <u>Everything in the world, including each human soul, is a part of Brahman</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Just like a single drop of water in a great ocean, the soul is both separate from and one with Brahman ■ A Hindu’s <u>spiritual goal is to unite his or her soul with Brahman</u> 	
MULTIPLE GODS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hindus <u>worship many gods and goddesses</u>, but believe the <u>gods are all aspects of the one Supreme God, Brahman</u> ■ The <u>multiple gods represent the countless different qualities and power of Brahman</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Some Hindu gods have humanlike personalities, and others represent such things as success, luck, and war</u> ■ Three of the <u>most important gods are Vishnu (preserver), Shiva (destroyer), and Brahma (creator)</u> 	<i>See below</i>

<p>DHARMA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Dharma = the system of rules and values Hindus follow in their everyday life</u> ■ Belief in a <u>universal dharma</u> that includes values all Hindus accept and practice, such as <u>nonviolence</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Also believe in an <u>individual dharma</u> that they should follow ■ Hinduism teaches that <u>when people follow their dharma</u> they contribute to the <u>harmony and balance</u> of society and the <u>universe</u> 	
<p>KARMA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Karma = the total of good and bad actions a human soul carries with it from life to life</u> ■ Belief that when people die, the soul leaves the body and is reborn into another body (<u>reincarnation</u>) ■ Hinduism teaches that people's <u>good and bad actions</u> in one life influence their destiny <u>in future lives</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Karma</u> determines whether a soul is reborn as a <u>human or animal</u>, into a <u>rich family or poor one</u>, and some of the things a person will experience in a lifetime. 	
<p>SAMSARA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <u>Samsara = the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (reincarnation)</u> ■ The <u>goal</u> of a Hindu's life is <u>to be released from samsara and united with</u> the Supreme God, <u>Brahman</u> ■ <u>Achieved after</u> a person's soul has lived through <u>many lifetimes</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hindus must <u>following</u> the path of <u>dharma</u>, <u>balance</u> their <u>karma</u>, <u>worship the Gods</u> faithfully, and have a <u>follow spiritual practices</u> in order to be released from samsara. 	

Brahma

- Creator of Hindu Trinity
- Sits on a lotus and has 4 heads and hands
- Carries a sruva (sacrificing tool), Vedas (knowledge), water, and a rosary



Vishnu

- Preserver and protector
- First hand holds a conch shell
- Second hand holds a chakra (wheel of time; living a good life)
- Third hand holds a lotus for a glorious existence
- Fourth hand holds a mace (power and punishment if discipline ignored)



Shiva

- Destroyer
- Shown meditating or dancing on the demon of foolishness or in a ring a fire
- Matted hair holds the Ganges river and a snake (shows power over deadly creatures)
- Carries a trident to show power over evil

Lakshmi

- Goddess of wealth
- Consort of Vishnu
- Sits on a blossomed lotus to show excellence
- Prayed to for wealth and a happy family





Saraswati

- Goddess of knowledge
- Four hands symbolize intellect, alertness, mind, and ego
- Sits on a swan
- Consort of Brahma

Durga

- Goddess of vanquishing evil
- She has eight hands that each hold weapons to show her power
- Shown riding either a tiger or lion



Ganesha

- Eldest son of Shiva and Parvati
- Remover of obstacles
- Four hands, an elephant head, and a round belly that symbolizes he carries the whole universe in his belly

