The Caste System
Defining Caste System
Caste system defined

The word caste is derived from the Portuguese casta meaning lineage, breed, or race.
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.
What Is The Caste System?

- Indian society developed into a complex system based on class and caste.
- Caste is based on the idea that there are separate kinds of humans.
- Higher-caste people consider themselves purer (closer to moksha) than lower-caste people.
- There are five different levels in the Indian Caste system.
- Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shrujra, and Harihans.
What is a “caste”? 

- "Caste" is the term used to describe the complex system of social divisions that pervades life in India.

- Caste is an ancient hereditary system that developed alongside and became intertwined with Hinduism.

Social and economic divides still exist across India.
What is a “caste”?

• Caste determines whom a person can marry, specifies what kind of work he can do, and even controls what he can eat or touch.

• Since the great majority of Indians are Hindu, the caste system has played an enormous role in the history of India, and it continues to exert tremendous influence on modern Indian culture and politics.
Impact of Caste System on Society
How Caste Shapes Society

• Rigid, hereditary membership into birth caste
• Marriage only among members of same caste
• Occupation choices restricted
• Personal contact with other castes restricted
• Acceptance of fixed place in society
Caste Systems Benefits

• Members of a caste rely on each other for support
Benefit of the Caste System: A System of Reciprocity and Redistribution

- 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

Priest

Potter

Carpenter

Today...more of a market system
Caste System is a Kinship System

- A caste (varna) is an intermarrying group
  - Kinship; hereditary membership
- A caste eats together
  - A high-caste Brahmin does not eat with someone of a lower caste; different diets for different castes
- Divided by occupation: priest, warrior, merchant, peasant
- Legal status, rights based on caste membership
  - Gandhi was refused permission to study in England
- Visible identifiers of caste
Key characteristics:

- The concept of ‘purity-pollution’.
- An inherited occupational role.
- Inability or restricted ability to alter inherited status.
- Socially enforced restrictions on inter-marriage.
- Segregation in location of living areas, and in access to and use of public places
- Subjection to debt bondage.
- Generalized lack of respect for their human dignity and equality.
History/Origins of the Caste System in India
Historical Development

- No commonly approved origin/history that explains the formation of Indian caste system.
- Common belief: the caste system was formed during the period of migration of Indo-Aryans to the Indian subcontinent.
Indian caste system

- Indian caste system is rooted in Hinduism and its order of four castes and four stages in life.
- Originates from the Aryan invaders four to five thousand years ago.
Where does this system come from?

The most widely accepted theory is that the four basic divisions of the Hindu caste system—the *varna*—developed in the period 1500-1000 B.C. as a result of the Aryan conquest of India.
The Laws of Manu

- smrti text made up of 2685 verses
- discusses religion, law, custom and politics
- approximately 1st century CE
- authorship is credited to Manu who is said to be the forefather of all humans,
  - author familiar with Vedic traditions and in The Laws of Manu seeks to formalize different parts of life related to social customs and conventions
- a controversial text
- includes
  - the four stages of life (arshans)
  - the caste system
  - the four aims of life (purusharthas)
  - the status of women
The Caste System

- Social classification structure based on four groups called *varnas*
  - smaller divisions called *jati*
  - hereditary
  - places restrictions on a person based on their caste
    - things like occupation, economic status, what laws are enforced
  - caste unchanging in single lifetime
  - caste changes between lifetimes based on a person’s *karma* and *dharma*
  - huge impact on India and is still in practice today
    - technically illegal
    - urban vs. rural
  - criticized for creating and promoting mass discrimination
Origin of Caste system

- Varna = color
  - Note colors assigned to each caste
- Variety of theories:
  - "Apparently, the Aryan invaders were even then thinking of a social system that separated people by occupation and sanctioned that separation through religion." (276)
  - System of separation of Aryans (light-skinned, twice-born) and others (darker skinned, once-born) (Dravidians)
Laws of Manu – Chapter 2

- In all castes those (children) only which are begotten in the direct order on wedded wives, equal (in caste and married as) virgins, are to be considered as belonging to the same caste (as their fathers).

- For by (adultery) is caused a mixture of the castes among men; thence (follows) sin, which cuts up even the roots and causes the destruction of everything.
So, the **Caste System** began in India after the Aryans invaded and established their own rules for governing the society.

The Aryans did not permit marriages between their own people and people of the cultures they conquered.

This was very different from the Romans, who encouraged the people they conquered and the soldiers to marry.
The Caste System

• The caste system, then, was based upon idea that people are different, so they should have different roles.
• From 1000 to 500 BC, four classes of people emerged in India.
• Really there are 5 groups, however the untouchables are considered so low that they aren’t even counted.
RIGVEDIC PERIOD

- More flexible than today’s caste system; it was even possible to change the castes if necessary.

POST-VEDIC PERIOD

- The caste system became more rigid/stricter.
How it developed

- Influenced by economic and social factors, the caste system became a traditional, hereditary system of social stratification.
- The varnas (or Castes which define the group's social standing in marital and occupational matters) are Brahmans (scholar caste), Kshatriya (warrior caste), Vaisya (trader and agriculturist caste), and Sudra (worker and cultivator caste).
The Four Varna

These four castes—*brahman, kshatriya, vaishya,* and *sudra*—are the classical four divisions of Hindu society. In practice, however, there have always been many subdivisions (*J'atis*) of these castes.
Religious origin of caste hierarchy

- Dismemberment of Purusha
  - Head (mouth): Brahmin (priest, teacher) (white)
  - Arms: Kshatariya (rulers, warriors) (red)
  - Legs: Vaishya (landlords, businessmen) (brown)
  - Feet: Sudra (peasants) (black)
Where does this system come from?

The earliest known mention of caste is found in the Aryan’s Vedic hymns, perhaps dating from about 1000 B.C.E.

In a famous passage, the metaphor of the human body was used to describe Indian society.

The *brahman*, or priestly, caste represents society's head; the *kshatriya*, or warrior, caste are its arms; the *vaishya* caste—traders and landowners—are the legs; and the *sudra* caste—the servants of the other three—are the feet.

This metaphor stresses the idea of hierarchy as well as that of interdependence.
Varna

WHO IS...

- The mouth?
- The arms?
- The legs?
- The feet?

Brahmins
Kshatriyas
Vaishyas
Shudras
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Varnas:</th>
<th>Twice Born:</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Color</th>
<th>Guṇa</th>
<th>Yuga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>वर्णे</td>
<td>वर्णेषु</td>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>ब्राह्मण</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>sattva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaiśyas</td>
<td>वैश्य</td>
<td>Kṣatriyas</td>
<td>चतुर्वेदि</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>rajas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaiśyas</td>
<td>वैश्य</td>
<td>Vaiśyas</td>
<td>वैश्य</td>
<td>brown</td>
<td>tamas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudras</td>
<td>शूद्र</td>
<td>Sudras</td>
<td>शूद्र</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>tamas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcastes:</td>
<td>जातिभ्रष्ट</td>
<td>Untouchables</td>
<td>तमस</td>
<td>tamas</td>
<td>bhaktiyoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Polluted Laborers</td>
<td>तमस</td>
<td>tamas</td>
<td>bhaktiyoga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bhagavad Gita Basis for Castes

• The Bhagavad Gita says this about the varnas:

• [41] The works of Brahmins, Ksatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras are different, in harmony with the three powers of their born nature.

• [42] The works of a Brahmin are peace; self-harmony, austerity, and purity; loving-forgiveness and righteousness; vision and wisdom and faith.

• [43] These are the works of a Ksatriya: a heroic mind, inner fire, constancy, resourcefulness, courage in battle, generosity and noble leadership.

• [44] Trade, agriculture and the rearing of cattle is the work of a Vaishya

• And the work of the Shudra is service.

• [chapter 18, Juan Mascaró translation, Penguin Books, 1962]
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
Twice Born
Meaning of Twice Born

- The first three varnas are called the *twice born*, *(dvija)*.
- This has *nothing* to do with reincarnation.
- Being "twice born" means that you *come of age* religiously, making you a member of the Vedic religion, eligible to learn Sanskrit, study the *Vedas*, and perform Vedic rituals.
- The "second birth" is thus like Confirmation or a Bar Mitzvah. According to the *Laws of Manu* (whose requirements may not always be observed in modern life), boys are "born again" at specific ages: 8 for Brahmins; 11 for Ksatriyas; and 12 for Vaishyas.
A thread is bestowed at the coming of age to be worn around the waist as the symbol of being twice born.

The equivalent of coming of age for girls is marriage. The bestowal of the thread is part of the wedding ceremony. That part of the wedding ritual is even preserved in Jainism.

According to the Laws of Manu, when the twice born come of age, they enter into the four āśramas, or "stages of life." I notice that dictionaries I have, both of Sanskrit and Hindi, say that these apply to Brahmins. But there is no doubt, from the Laws of Manu and from the history, that all they apply to all the twice born.
Implications of Twice Born

- The twice born may account for as much as 48% of Hindus, though I have now seen the number put at more like 18% -- quite a difference but more believable.
- The Shudras (58% of Hindus) may represent the institutional provision that the Arya made for the people they already found in India.
- The Shudras thus remain once born, and traditionally were not allowed to learn Sanskrit or study the Vedas -- on pain of death.
- Their *dharma* is to work for the twice born.
- But even below the Shudras are the Untouchables (24% of Hindus), who are literally "outcastes," (*jâtibhrasta*), without a varna, and were regarded as "untouchable" because they are ritually polluting for caste Hindus.
- Some Untouchable subcastes are regarded as so polluted that members are supposed to keep out of sight and do their work at night: They are called "Unseeables."
How One’s Caste is Determined

• **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 Is One’s Caste Determined
Karma

- A belief that man obtains or reaps in his next rebirth what he has planted or sown in his previous existence.
- Along with the belief of reincarnation, Hindus believe that if they fulfill the roles of their present castes, they will be reincarnated into a higher caste.
How One’s Caste is Determined

- **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
What Are The Different Castes?
The Four Castes

- **Brahmins** – Priests, Teachers, Judges; usually don’t own land therefore need other castes to work the land and provide for them
- **Kshatriiyas** – 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** – Outcasts, Children of God

- **Concept of pollution**…the most pure at the top (Brahmins) and the most polluted at the bottom (Untouchables)
The castes
upper class
Brahmins
Brahmins - Priests

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

- Were the priests
- Highest ranking
- They performed rituals for the gods
- There were only a few of them.
- Only Brahman men were allowed to go to school, or to teach in schools (Brahman women could not go to school).
Brahman

- Brahmans were considered the scholars and priests of the caste system.
  - Also frequently cooks because they could only eat food prepared by Brahmans

- The highest castes in the system
Brahmins

- The first and the highest class; intellectuals of the nations such as landowners, scholars, and priests.
- They are not allowed to do any job of lower castes.
- They may receive things from lower castes, but they don’t give anything in return to them.
BRAHMAN

• They are the priestly class, who are entitled to study the Vedas, which are the sacred scriptures, and perform rites rituals for themselves and for others.

• They are the men between the gods and the people.

• They are expected to show excellent behavior and spend their lives in the pursuit of divine knowledge and preservation the traditions of Hinduism.
• **Laws of Manu – Chapter 4 – Brahmin varna**

  ▪ Teaching, studying, sacrificing for himself, sacrificing for others, making gifts and receiving them are the six acts of the brahmin.
Laws of Manu – Chapter 1

- In consequence of (many) sinful acts committed with his body, a man becomes (in the next birth) something inanimate, in consequence (of sins) committed by speech, a bird, a beast, and in consequence of mental (sins he is re-born in) a low caste.

- Austerity and sacred learning are the best means by which a Brahmin secures supreme bliss; by austerities he destroys guilt, by sacred learning he obtains the cessation of (births and) deaths.
Kshatriyas
Kshatriyas - Warriors and Rulers

• Responsible for leadership of the people
• Often rely on advice from Brahmins
Kshatriyas

- Rulers or warriors
- A lot of them were in the army, or leaders in other ways.
- Women could not be warriors, but they could be Kshatriyas anyway.
Kshatriyas

• A class directly follows Brahmins; mostly rulers and warriors.
• They managed the land, military service, and administration.
• They practice strict caste endogamy, marrying only within their caste.
Kshatriya

- These people are the ruler (kings), warrior (military), and landowner of the caste system
KSHATRIYAS

• They are the warrior class, who are commanded to protect the people, give gifts to the Brahmins, offer sacrifices to gods and ancestors, study the Vedas, and dispense justice.

• It was their responsibility to protect the caste system and the social order and lavish the priests with generous gifts at every opportunity.
The Caste System

- **Laws of Manu – Chapter 4 - Kshatriya varna**
  - Let no man therefore, transgress that law which the king decrees with his favorites, nor (his orders) which inflict pain on those in disfavor.

  - Punishment alone governs all created beings, punishment alone protects them, punishment watches over them while they sleep; the wise declare punishment (to be identical with) the law.

  - If (punishment) is properly inflicted after (due) considerations it makes all people happy; but inflicted without consideration, it destroys everything.

  - Not to turn back in battle, to protect the people, to honor the Brahmins, is the best means for a king to secure happiness
The castes
middle class
Vaisyas
Vaisyas – Skilled Traders, Merchants

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

- Farmers, craftspersons, and traders
- Owned their own farms or businesses.
- There were a lot of them
These people are the merchants and cultivators of the caste system.

(They feed the people)
Vaisyas

• The third class composed of traders, shopkeepers, moneylenders, farmers, and artisans; trading and banking.

• Typically stricter in observing their dietary rules and avoiding any kind of ritual pollution.
VAISYAS

• They are the merchant and peasant classes, who are expected to tend cattle, offer sacrifices, study the Vedas, trade, lend money and farm the land.

• They had the right to perform and participate in certain Vedic rituals but they were not allowed to marry women of higher castes.
Laws of Manu – Chapter 4 - Vaishya varna

- After a vaishya has received the sacraments and has taken a wife, he shall be always attentive to the business whereby he may subsist and to (that of) tending cattle.

- Let him exert himself to the utmost in order to increase his property in a righteous manner, and let him zealously give food to all created things.
The castes
lowest
classes
Sudras or Shudras
Sudras – Unskilled Workers

- Each subgroup of this caste performs a specific service.
- Jobs include gardeners, potters, and clothes washers.
Sudra (Shudra)

- These are the skilled people in the caste system known as the artisans (craftsmen) and agriculturalist (farmers)
- Also the laborers
Sudras

- Laborers, workers, servants or non-aryans
- Did not own their own business or their own land
- Had to work for other people.
- Largest Caste
SUDRAS

- They are the laboring class, whose only duty is to serve the other three castes.
- They were not required to observe any Vedic rituals.
- They were not allowed to study the Vedas or even hear the sacred chants.
- They were not allowed to eat food in the company of higher castes or marry their women.
Laws of Manu – Chapter 4 – Shudra varna

(A shudra who is) pure, the servant of his betters, gentle in his speech, and free from pride, and always seeks a refuge with Brahmins attains (in his next life) a higher caste.

But a shudra, whether bought or unbought, he may be compelled to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent to be the slave of a brahmin.
Clean Sudras

• Endogamous peasant castes; free to intermarrary and are allowed more freedom in social relations.

Lower Sudras

• Those with very specialized but less respected professions such as those of potters, blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, etc.
Harijan or Untouchables or Dalits
HARIJAN also called *Untouchables*

- The lowest of the sudras were called harijan or the untouchables.

- They were outside of the caste system because of their religious practices, rites and unclean habits.

- In ancient times they were not allowed to enter a village or city during day time or walk in the same street where men of other castes walked.
HARIJAN also called Untouchables

- Even their shadow was considered impure and seeing an untouchable was considered bad luck.

- So they lived mostly on the edges of society, unknown and uncared for, and working in graveyards or as hunters, butchers and professional cleaners of human waste.
The Caste System

- **Untouchables/Outcastes**
  - this not officially a caste but would rank below the shudra
  - consist of people who are considered unclean
  - typically uncleanliness is related to occupation
  - may also relate to a disease such as Leprosy
Harijan or Untouchables or Dalits

• This is the lowest class of the caste system, called “untouchables”

• Given this name because at a point they were known to be the dirtiest people in the system and they were not fit to be touch

• If a Brahmin priest touches an untouchable, he or she must go through a ritual in which the pollution is washed away.
Untouchables - The Outcastes

- 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”
Inevitably, there were certain people who failed to live up to their caste dharma.

Such people and their children were considered outcasts from Hindu society.

They had to live apart from other castes and were given the jobs that no one else wanted to perform.

Because of their contact with things considered unclean or polluted, the outcasts were believed to be deeply tainted.

They came to be thought of as "untouchable" because people believed that their touch—or even the sight of them—would compromise a brahman's purity.

The untouchables were not admitted into Hindu temples and instead formed religious sects of their own.
Untouchables

• Untouchables usually did the worst jobs, like cleaning up people's poop from the gutters, or collecting garbage.
• No one from any other caste were supposed to have contact with them
• Were seen as outcasts
Dalits or Untouchables

• People who don’t belong to any of the 4 castes; Outcastes. They are limited to menial or even “polluting” jobs.

• They are not allowed to share anything with the upper castes.
Harijan

- They are forced to live on the outskirts of towns and villages, and they must take water downstream from and not share wells with varna Hindus.
- Hindus think that a person is born to this class because of bad karma he or she earned in a previous life.
Harijans or “Scheduled Castes”

Over the centuries, they also organized into sub-castes much like those of orthodox Hindu society.

In the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi made it one of his life's goals to bring the untouchables back into Hindu society.

He renamed them the *harijans*, or "children of God," and tried to convince orthodox Hindus to admit them into their temples and their everyday lives.
The Untouchables

Social stratification has ousted the untouchables from the rest of Indian society.
The Untouchables

- Emerged from forbidden and tabooed mixing between the high and the low castes.
- The Untouchables were also made Unseeable, Unapproachable, Unhearable.
- Untouchables had no surname. They did not choose their children’s names.
- Untouchable women could not wear any clothes above waste.
- Untouchables could not enter a Hindu temple.
Rules Of Caste System
How It Affects Daily Life
Caste Rules

- People were not allowed to marry people from different castes
- Couldn’t eat with people from different castes
- If you broke the rules then you were banned from your home and caste making you an untouchable
- The effect of the caste rules was that people only spent time with others from their caste
The Rules

The rules are meant to help people remain spiritually pure.

- Rules are especially strict for the members of higher castes, who are considered especially pure.
- They would risk pollution if they interacted with a lower caste member.
- Ex. Some castes were thought to be so impure that their shadow would pollute others so they had to strike a wooden clapper to warn others of their approach.
Rules, Rules, Rules, and more Rules

- You are born into your caste and your caste will determine your job (parents knew what jobs their children would have before they were born.)

- Traditionally people only marry members of the same caste although marriage outside of ones caste was not unheard of.

- In fact, having a woman marry a man of a higher varna is a way for a family to achieve social mobility.
Caste and Dharma

In Hindu religious texts, the dharma—the law, or duty—of each varna is described.

It was thought that this dharma was an inherited, or inborn, quality.

Consequently, people thought that if intermarriages took place, there would be much confusion as to the dharma of the next generation of children.

As a result of such concerns, marriage between different castes was strictly prohibited.

The practice of marrying only a person of "one's own kind" is called endogamy and is still a central rule in many Hindu communities.
Nurture and upbringing

• *Dharma* (a man) has to go through four stages of life:
• *Brahmacharya* – student stage,
• *Gruhastas Ashrama* – householder stage,
• *Vanaprasta Ashrama* – hermitage state,
• *Sanyasa Ashrama* – strive towards moshka or liberation.
Caste system in India

- Marriage is allowed only within caste.
- Caste is a social unit. It is autonomous: Each caste sets its own rules.
EFFECTS of Caste System

Social example) Banning of intercaste marriages

Political example) Domination of higher castes in Indian government

Economical example) Limitation of jobs/occupations
CHALLENGES against Caste System

- Formations of pro-equality religions such as Buddhism.
- International movements led by organizations such as United Nations.
- Laws issued by the Constitution of India.
After the emergence of Buddhism there have been attempts to abolish caste system.

In 1833 the British declared that no person on account of “his religion, place of birth, descent, color” would be disabled from holding any office or employment.

Great movement against caste system was started by Mahatma Ghandi.
The barriers between the sub-caste weakened in the twentieth century.

The Indian Constitution of 1950 proclaimed the principle of equality to all citizens irrespective of caste differences, and abolished the practice of untouchability.
Independence and Untouchables

After India became an independent nation in 1947, its new constitution outlawed the practice of "untouchability."

The constitution also established affirmative action programs to ensure that the scheduled castes would have access to higher education and better jobs.

Because of these programs, there has been a marked improvement in the status of the scheduled castes.
Modern Caste System
Modern Caste System

“The Indian caste system is gradually relaxing, especially in metropolitan and other major urban areas, due to higher penetration of high education, co-existence of all communities and lesser knowledge about caste system due to alienation with rural roots of people.

But in the countryside and small towns, this system is still very rigid.

However, the total elimination of caste system seems distant, if ever possible, due to caste politics.”
Harijans or "Scheduled Castes"

However, other leaders doubted that upper-caste Hindus would ever treat the harijans as equals.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a distinguished scholar who had been born an "untouchable," was a leading spokesman for this view.

He used the term scheduled castes when referring to this group, for he believed that the term harijans was demeaning.

The scheduled castes, he said, should withdraw from Hinduism altogether and join another religion, such as Buddhism, which does not recognize caste distinctions.
Impact on Present and Future

• Rigidity and strictness in urban areas are weakened due to better implementation of laws.
• Discrimination of lower castes is still common in rural areas.
• The Caste System which has a long history of discrimination, is difficult to be taken out of one’s life.
International Community

• United Nations (UN) is set to declare the caste system as a human rights abuse.

Efforts of Indian Government

• The Outlawing of the use of untouchability/Dalits.
• Usage of affirmative action, or positive discrimination.
Nowadays, due to the efforts of the government and the international society, people from different castes have their own share in the society, and therefore they can ensure proper representation in the state.
Why does the system persist?

Today, the caste system continues to be the main form of government in villages throughout India.

In large part, its continuity depends on two central Hindu concepts: caste dharma and karma.

In Hindu society, caste dharma is considered to be a divine law.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, caste dharma is "the duty one has to perform" and "the law of one's being."

Many Hindus believe that this obligation tends to enhance the spiritual development of the individual.

Because of it, each person learns from an early age to overcome selfish desires and instead focus on group goals and ideals.
Why does the system persist?

The concept of karma helps to explain differences in status that might otherwise be considered unfair.

Because one's caste membership is thought to be a result of actions in a previous life, a person tends to accept this status rather than complain about it.

By the same token, a successful performance of caste duty will improve one's karma and perhaps lead to improved status in the next life.
Why does the system persist?

The caste system also returns certain practical benefits to the individual. Being a member of a *jati* gives each person a sense of identity and of belonging to a well-defined group within society. The members of a *jati* have much in common.

They share a job specialty and abide by the same rules concerning diet and religion.

Because of the rules of endogamy, each *jati* is also an extended family, for most members are related by blood.
Reservation System
The Reservation System

In 1950, the writers of independent India's Constitution adopted a policy of reserving jobs in the government and seats in state-funded educational institutes for the "scheduled castes and tribes," as the people marginalized by the caste system were then known.

India sets aside 22.5% of its government jobs for the lowest castes, and an additional 27% for what are called the other "backward" castes, the next step up in the caste system.
The Reservation System

Sparks flew in spring 2006 when the Indian government pushed to extend the same quotas to university admissions. Students took to the streets of New Delhi to protest the plan.

(Currently, out of the 36,000 undergraduate seats at Delhi University, nearly 8,000 are reserved for lower-caste students. Today an estimated 36 percent of the population falls under the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) category, the group receiving the new reservations.)
Is it Fair?

India’s constitution guarantees “equal rights.”

- **Article 14** says that the state gives to every person “equality before the law” and “equal protection of the laws.”
- **Article 15** prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, etc.
- **Article 16** guarantees **equality of opportunity** in matters of public employment, etc.
Is it Fair?

At the same time, the constitution provides for a “reservation system.”

**Article 46** says “The state shall promote with special care the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.”

Respond: Does India’s reservation system contradict (go against) her constitution’s promise of “equal rights”? 