

**The Caste System**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**World History I/ Mr. George**

Caste is the system of social organization. Each person is born into a caste and expects to be reborn after death into a higher caste. Socially mobile Westerners may have difficulty understanding why a person would accept caste. Hindus, with their sense of security, occupation continuity, and guarantee of rebirth to a higher plane, wonder at Westerners discontent and ambition. Restrictions on caste involve regulation on cooking and dining, marriage, occupation and social position. These help to maintain the mosaic that is India, but they foster stagnation. Read the following Bronze Age Vedic poem on the origin of the castes.

When the [the gods] divided the Man,  
Into how many parts did they divide him?  
What was his mouth, what were his arms,  
What were his thighs and his feet called?  
The brahman [priest] was his mouth,  
Of his arms was made the warrior,  
His thighs became the vaishya [farmer or merchant]  
Of his feet the shudra [servant] was born.

This poem demonstrates two aspects of the Indian caste system. First, that it appears to be divinely ordered and is therefore acceptable; secondly, that all parts of the caste are integral parts of the man—Indian society.

Another group, the untouchables, were considered to be ritually unclean because they held occupations which were religiously improper, i.e., slaughtering animals, cutting hair, cleaning up streets and human excrement, etc. These persons were considered necessary to society, but outside the bounds of the caste system. All person, however, would be reborn again and again and all would rise up through the levels of society and eventually become pure enough to enter paradise. The lower one was in the caste system, the less expected of them regarding behavior.

**DIRECTIONS: COMPLETE THE CHART ON THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE CASTE SYSTEM AS YOU CAN BEST IDENTIFY THEM.**

<b>Caste System</b>	
<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>