**Caste System**

The caste system developed in India over 3000 years ago. Created by Aryan priests from Central Asia, the system had separate levels of society and was considered religious law.

**Brahmans**, those at the highest level of the caste system, were typically priests, earthly gods, religious leaders, or teachers. The next level was the **Kshatriyas**, the wealthy ruling families, kings, and warriors. These people owned most of the land and villages. The third caste was the **Vaishyas**, the business men, money-lenders, merchants, and farmers. The fourth caste was the **Shudras**, the laborers, artisans, shoemakers, and leather workers. Below the Shudras were the **Untouchables**. They had no caste, and they performed chores no other caste would do, such as collecting dead oxen and sweeping the streets.

According to the Hindu law, each caste had a strict set of duties. The only way a person became a member of a particular caste was by birth. One could not marry someone from another caste and one could not get a job outside of his or her caste. The Hindu idea of *reincarnation* kept the caste system alive. Hindus believe when a person dies, he or she is reincarnated as another being, hopefully in a higher caste. The only way to move to a higher caste in the next life is to strictly obey the rules of one’s current caste.

The caste system is still prevalent in India, but has relaxed somewhat. Arranged marriages within a caste still occur, but occasionally people now marry outside their caste. Most of the jobs and government positions are open to different castes, and children are not required to pursue the occupations of their parents.

While many people still observe some aspects of the caste system, it is no longer a law to observe the old rules. Many people, like Mahatma Gandhi, worked to end the caste system. Their work was rewarded by a *proclamation* in 1949 outlawing discrimination against the Untouchables and the lower castes.

1. What was this article about?
2. What purpose do **you** think the caste system had?

1. Which religion uses the caste system?
2. How would you normally move up to the next caste?
3. What is *reincarnation*, according to the text?

1. What do you think proclamation means in this reading?
2. Label the picture with the different caste levels. Make sure the highest caste is on top and the lowest is at the bottom.