**Excerpt 4:**

The English word ‘caste’ might mean either varna or jati. Varna refers to an ideal model, a plan or design of society whereas jati refers to the actual social groups with which people identify themselves and on whose basis they interact with each other. The varnas are only four in number – Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra – and they were the same and were ranked in the same order among Hindus everywhere, from ancient to modern times; this scheme has now lost its legal authority and also much of its social authority. The jatis are many in number and often internally segmented; although they vary from one religion to another and have changed their identities over time, they continue to maintain an active existence among most Indians.

Membership in a caste is by birth, and caste is extremely important in [marriage](http://www.credoreference.com.libproxy.unm.edu/entry.do?id=9797895). Most Indians, especially Hindus, marry within their caste. Nowadays individuals might marry in a different subcaste of their own caste, and sometimes in a different, though cognate, caste; but marriages without consideration of caste are still rare. In the past, each caste was associated with a distinct traditional occupation, and a caste might be divided into subcastes in keeping with differences in occupational practice. The emergence of a large number of modern, ‘castefree’ occupations has greatly weakened the specific association between caste and occupation; but there is still a general association, such that those in superior non-manual occupations are mostly from the upper castes, and those in inferior manual occupations mostly from the lower castes. Castes were elaborately ranked in the past, and the social ranking of castes is still conspicuous. This ranking has been characteristically expressed in the ritual idiom of pollution and purity, although economic factors were always important and are now increasingly so.

Title: "[caste](http://www.credoreference.com.libproxy.unm.edu/entry/routencsca/caste)."

Source : Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology. London: Routledge, 2009.

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