



# Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste

By Brian K. Smith

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The first book to analyze why India's caste system has authoritatively endured for so long, this path-breaking text provides, for the first time anywhere, an exhaustive analysis of the historical predecessor to caste: the ancient Indian *varna* system as it was laid out in the Vedic literature. Presenting a revisionist overview of the way the religion of the Veda is to be understood, *Classifying the Universe* demonstrates that social classes were systematically reduplicated in taxonomies that organized the universe as a whole. The classification of society, in which some groups were accorded rights and privileges withheld from others, could thus be represented as part of a primordial and universally applicable order of things. Social hierarchy, argues the author, was in this way subtly but powerfully justified by recourse to other realms of the cosmos that were similarly ordered, and this essentially religious understanding of *varna* is the key to comprehending the Vedic world-view in all its complexity, and the persistence of its power in the social realm.

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"...illuminating study...Smith has managed to combine close textual analysis with a discussion of...issues...in a highly rewarding manner. There is an excellent index."--American Historical Review

"Excellent documentation and challenging to theorists on classification systems."--Whalen Lai, University of California at Davis

"Explains a complex and difficult subject in clear, simple language."--H.L. Seneviratne, University of Virginia

"A helpful addition to our understanding of the development both of caste and the Hindu mindset. Well researched and documented."--Robert K.C. Forman, Hunter College

"A creative and wide-ranging application of the idea that varna is the underlying classificatory principle of Indian society and thought."--Richard W. Lariviere, University of Texas, Austin

"Impeccable scholarship--a truly original book. Smith writes clearly and elegantly, illuminating the complex sophistication of ancient Indian taxonomies, and bringing theory into the palpable, objective universe of flora, fauna, and people, where it belongs."--Indira V. Peterson, Mount Holyoke College

Reviewed in Journal of the American Academy of Religion

#### **About the Author**

Brian K. Smith is at University of California, Riverside.

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Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste can be one of your beginner books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocab, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The author giving his/her effort to put every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing Classifying the Universe: The Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste nevertheless doesn't forget the main level, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource information that maybe you can be one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into completely new stage of crucial contemplating.

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