

Social Hierarchy

A *society* can be defined as groups of people who are mutually or non-mutually dependent on each other to meet certain needs. Societies group together large numbers of people who each serve a specific role; this creates a *social hierarchy*. People are then organized into different *social classes* based on three main factors: wealth, power, and influence. The social class you are considered to be part of reflects these qualifications. Social hierarchies have been used by different cultural regions throughout history. In the Middle Ages, there was a definite structure in society. You were born into a class of people and generally stayed in that class for your entire life. Working hard did not change your status.

Feudalism

1. Kings

Kings came into power a number of different ways. In many cultures, the right to rule was considered part of the king's blood. When a king died, his eldest son would become king. If the king didn't have a son, then his brother or another male relative may be appointed to the throne. New kings were crowned in a special ceremony called a coronation, where a leader from the church (such as the pope or a bishop) crowned the king. Kings were often anointed with holy oil to demonstrate their divine right to rule. Of course, no king could rule without the support of his nobles and lords. In exchange for fealty, or a pledge of loyalty and military service, the king would give a gift of land to his nobles under the feudal system. The King owned all the land in the country and decided which noblemen would receive a fief, or a piece of land. The noble receiving the fief then became a vassal of the king.

2. Vassals (Nobles)

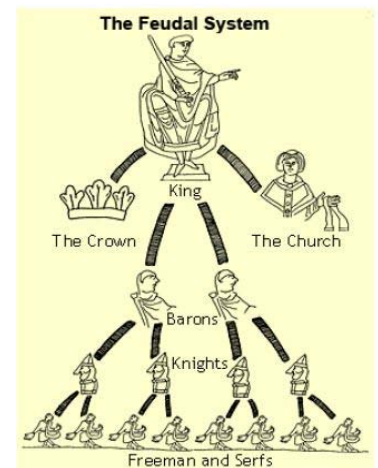
Vassals, also called barons or lords, were nobles who received gifts of land from the King and were generally wealthy and powerful. Under the feudal system, the noble class controlled political life. Vassals built large castles on the fiefs granted by the King, which were maintained by the manorial system; the vassal was known as the Lord of the Manor and established his own system of justice, minted money and collected taxes. They built up large armies of knights, who were supposed to be the King's army when he demanded it. However, there were many civil wars fought either between land-grabbing nobles hungry for power or nobles who challenged the King's authority in hopes of usurping his throne.

3. Knights

Knights were highly trained armed warriors on horseback that were maintained by the vassals and sent to fight for the King when he demanded their service. They also protected the nobleman, his family, and the Manor from attack. The path to knighthood began at the age of seven, when a vassal sent his son to the lord's house to become a page, where he received instructions in courtesy, cleanliness, and religion. At 14 the page became a squire, a personal attendant to a knight. From the knight he learned riding and all the skills of war, as well as hunting, hawking, and other sports. By age 21, the squire was knighted in a religious ceremony where he swore to live up to the knightly code which asked him to "protect the weak, defenseless, and helpless, and fight for the general welfare of all." This code, called chivalry, blended Church ideals with military values and remained the standard for proper behavior amongst knights for centuries.

4. Serfs & Freeman

Peasant farmers known as serfs gave the noble part of their harvest in return for the use of their land and protection from attacks by outsiders. Serfs were not allowed to leave the Manor and even had to ask their Lord's permission before they could marry. If a Feudal Lord were to sell one of his manors to another Nobleman, it included not only the land, livestock, and working tools, but the serfs on the land as well.



Church Hierarchy

One of the most unifying elements of the Middle Ages was the Roman Catholic Church. All classes and ranks of people — nobles, peasants and tradesmen — were profoundly affected by the rulings of the church. In the latter part of the Middle Ages, people were heavily taxed to support the church. In return for their tax money they received the “way to everlasting life” and happiness after leading lives that were often short and hard.

1. Pope

The clergy were the religious members of the Church. The pope, as head of the church, had much influence over the king and total control of the clergy. To prove their loyalty, kings often gave significant portions of their lands to the Church.

2. Cardinals & Bishops

Cardinals and bishops were accepted in court and generally lived with the same luxuries as the nobles in the Middle Ages. They wore lavish clothes with hats called miters (a tall hat that looks like a pointed arch). Cardinals managed the Church from each country, while bishops administered to the needs of priests and their parishes.

3. Priests

Priests weren't rich like the bishops. They were generally the head of local church. Priests cared for the spiritual life of people. They administered sacraments, oversaw the life of the manor, absolved men and women of their sins through confession and made pronouncements to the community that were given by the bishops or the pope.

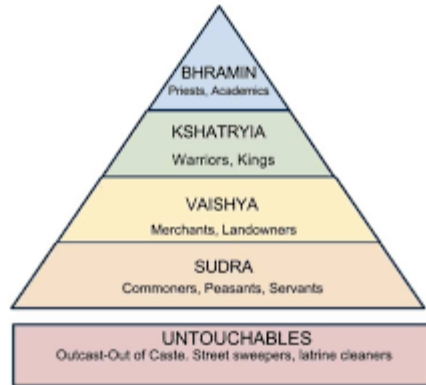
4. Monks & Nuns

Monks were often scholarly and could read and write in Latin. They wore brown gowns with hoods that often were made of wool. Monks were clean-shaven, but often they shaved a bald spot on the top of their head called a “tonsure” as a symbol of humility. Monks lived in monasteries and served as examples of the perfect Christian life. They were scholars who sometimes copied the books of the Bible by hand. (This was before the invention of the printing press.) They also generally worked to support themselves in the monastery by gardening and land management. They also sometimes educated the sons of the nobles.

Nuns were very holy and lived in a convent. They generally wore long gowns or tunics of black, grey or white. Generally their heads were shaved and covered by a cloth covering called a wimple. Nuns were very devout and served the people. They sometimes were taught to read and write, but they were not as scholarly as monks. They sometimes did work on manuscripts. Other less-educated nuns did harder work. Many families placed their daughters in convents and the convent was given a dowry for taking them. Older women who became widows were also sent to convents. This was often done so that the woman would have a secure life.

India: Hindu Caste System

India's caste system is one of the oldest in history, dating back to at least 1000 years BCE. Many Indians believe that the caste system was a creation of the Hindu god Brahma, and each of the classes was created based on differing levels of his input. According to scripture, the only way a person could change their caste was through devotion, meditation, and prayer so that their caste could change after reincarnation, in the next life.



1. Brahmins

Priests, intellectuals, and teachers were thought to come from Brahma's head, so they were named Brahmins. They were the most privileged of the castes, and were considered essential for the continuation of knowledge. However, because of their status, they often refused to interact with members of other castes. They were known to bathe if even the shadow of an untouchable fell across their own.

2. Kshatriyas

This caste was made up of government workers and soldiers, and were the monitors of people staying within their specific castes. They were also responsible for the administration of law and order, and the country's defense.

3. Vaishyas

Skilled workers, craftsmen, artists, and business owners were called Vaishyas. Due to the fact that traders were required to travel to sell goods, the spread and diffusion of Indian culture and ideals is credited to this class.

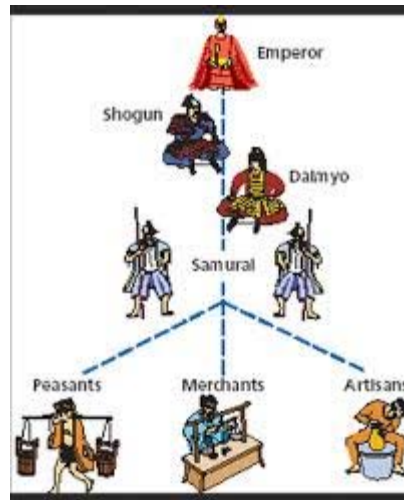
4. Sudras

Unskilled workers like maids and farm laborers were considered to be Sudras, a class that was written in Hindu text to be in continual service to the three upper classes.

5. Dalits (Untouchables)

The untouchables were the lowest classes of society and were not allowed to have any interaction with the upper classes. They were only allowed in the homes of the other castes in order to dispose of spoiled food or the emptying of chamber pots. They had to wear belts with bells on them in order to alert members of the other castes that they were in the area.

Shoguns



1. Emperor

Although the emperor was classed as the leader of feudal Japan, he actually had very little power and control over the country, as the government was dominated by the military force. The emperor was seen more like a figurehead, and was a symbolic and religious figure to the Japanese people. However, as the time went on towards the end of the feudal Japan in the Edo period, the emperor regained his power.

1. Shogun

The shogun was the highest class in the noble class. They were also the military and political leader of feudal Japan and held the most power. The shoguns were appointed by the emperor and simply meant a 'general' originally, however, the shoguns gained the highest rank during the feudal period due to their physical strengths. Shoguns were rulers of Japan until its abolishment just before the beginning of the Meiji period.

1. Daimyo

Daimyos, feudal warlords, were categorized just below and reported directly to the shogun, making them also very powerful rulers. Daimyos were in fact more powerful than shoguns at times. How strong the shoguns completely depended on how many daimyo they had under them. The word daimyo originally meant large private land owners. They had a lot of advantages over others, for instance, they were exempt from paying any taxes.

2. Samurai

Samurais, best described as warriors or soldiers in feudal Japan were those hired by daimyo in order to protect them from other daimyos. Samurais were also known as buke or *bushi*. Samurais were seen as brave and privileged class in feudal Japan as only less than 10 percent of the people in the period belonged in this social class. Samurai warriors were very loyal to their leaders or more suitably called employers. When their daimyo either died or was defeated in a battle, the samurais under the daimyo became *ronins*. How powerful a daimyo depended significantly on how many samurais he was master of.

3. Peasants, Artisans, & Merchants

Peasants were ranked at the top of the lower class, including farmers and fishermen. Although peasants in feudal Japan were often poor, they were regarded highly because they produced food for the country. Artisans, often known as craftsmen, were ranked below peasants in the feudal Japanese society. Some of the professions of this social class included musicians, actors, entertainers, singers, painters and sculptors. Merchants, although wealthy, were the lowest social rank in feudal Japan because they sold things that other people had made, and took money from other people in a dishonest way.